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AMERICA'S #1 INDEPENDENT VIDEO-GAME MAGAZINE

NO. 275

6/21

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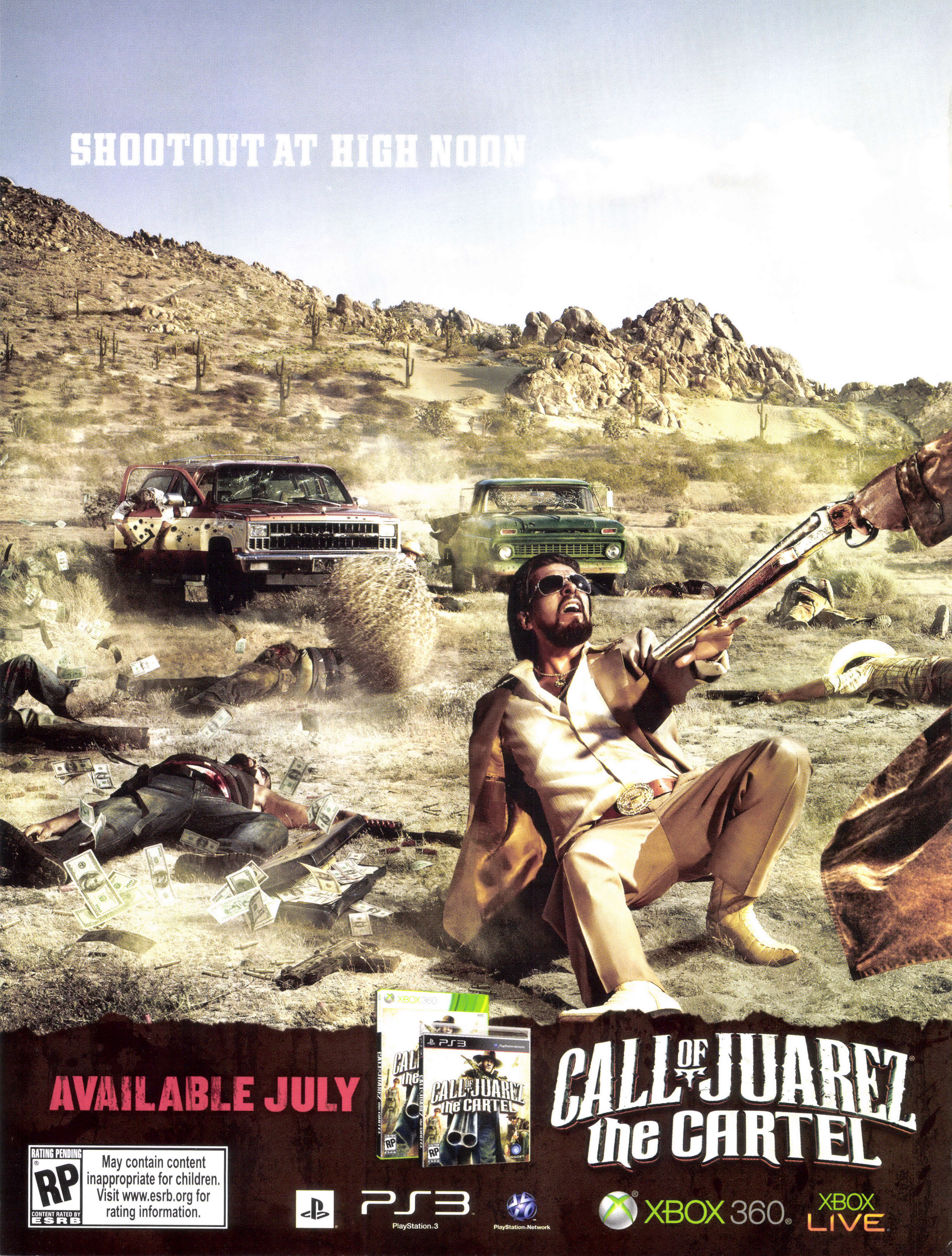
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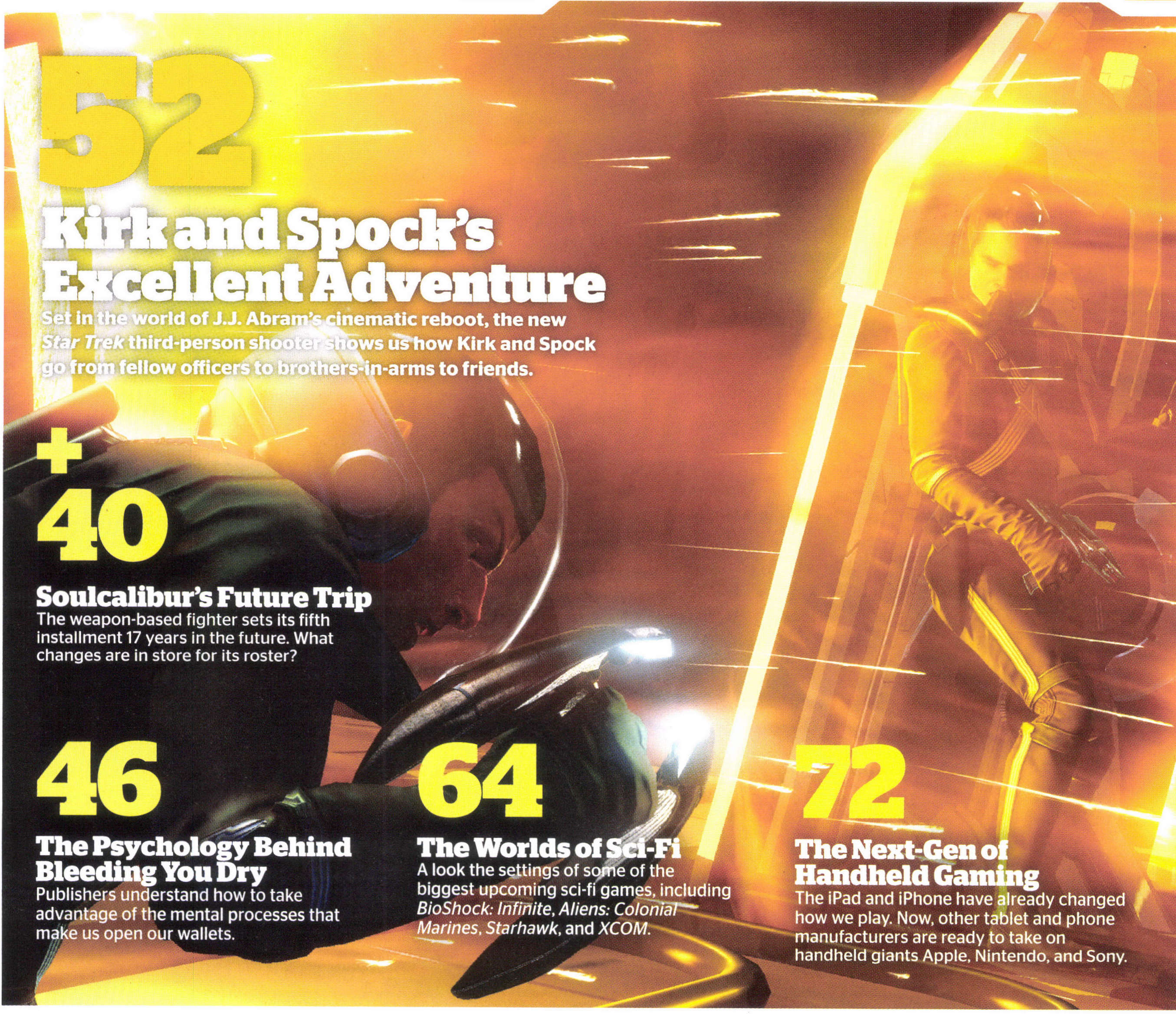

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The iPad and iPhone have already changed how we play. Now, other tablet and phone manufacturers are ready to take on handheld giants Apple, Nintendo, and Sony.

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The last two years has seen a rise in the quality of free-to-play games. Let's look at what's on the horizon for those gaming on the cheap.

#275

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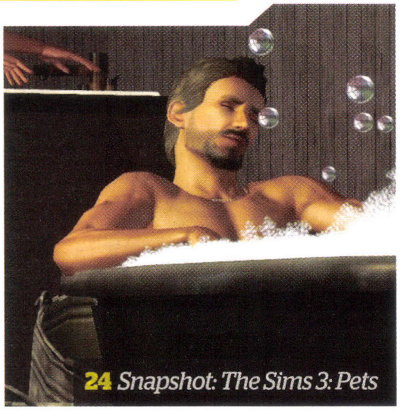
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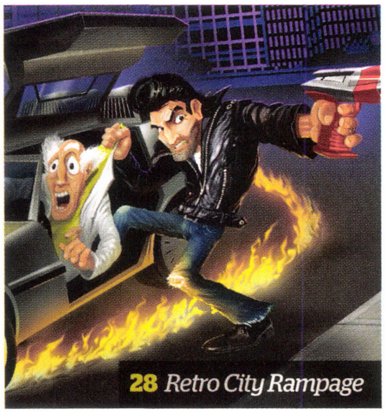
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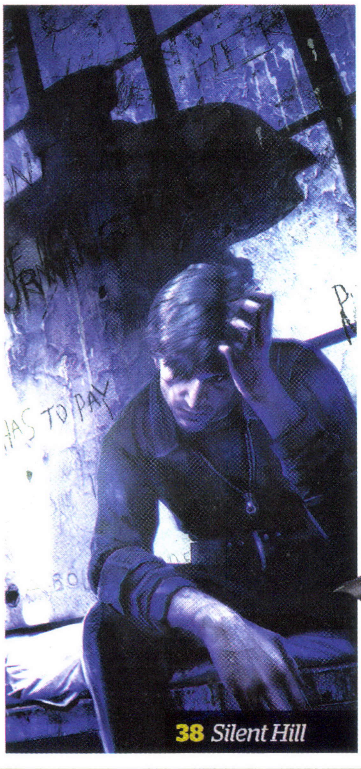
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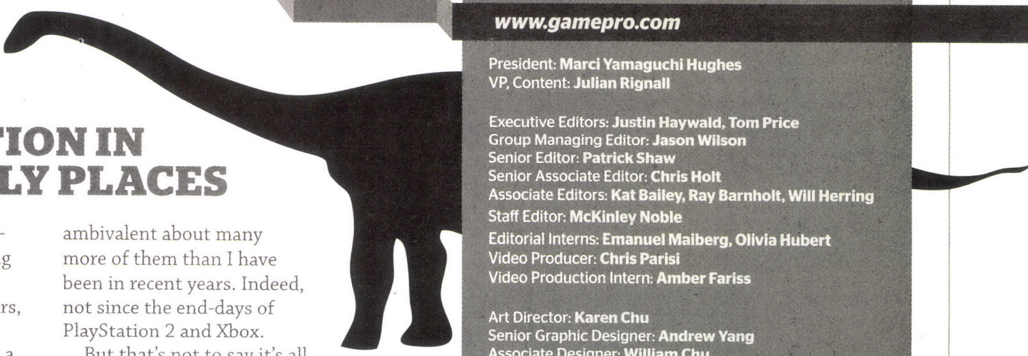

EVOLUTION IN UNLIKELY PLACES

The cyclical nature of the videogame industry is an interesting one. Every few years, a new generation of machines appears, usually within a short amount of time of each other. This usually precipitates a big step forward in gaming—technically for sure, and to a slightly lesser extent, on a creative/gameplay front. Then, as the new generation of consoles matures and developers begin to understand the machines better, we gradually see games improve year after year in an evolutionary way, until the next generation of consoles comes along, whereupon we get the next big step forward.

What tends to happen at the end of the cycle, however, is that we see a lot of sequels (and sequels of sequels) and developers finding it increasingly more challenging to squeeze additional juice out of the technology to keep games moving forward. This situation creates a general feeling of stagnation. Of course, there will always be exceptions, but nevertheless momentum seems to slow, and excitement about new games wanes.

I think we're in that period at the moment—at least, the consoles are. With new hardware from Microsoft and Nintendo on the horizon, it definitely feels like the current generation of consoles is winding down. This year, while there are some games that look great, I'm feeling ambivalent about many more of them than I have been in recent years. Indeed, not since the end-days of PlayStation 2 and Xbox.

But that's not to say it's all doom and gloom. For the first time in years, we have two other exciting areas of gaming to pique our interest. The PC is kicking ass and taking names, and I'm seeing some seriously interesting things happening there. For the first time in years there are more must-buy PC games on my list than console games.

Then we have the mobile market. The 3DS is out, and it's fun. NGP is coming, and that is one of the biggest surprises—I had many doubts about it, but actually, it's looking like a dead cert for my "Dear Santa" list. And when it comes to tablets, games are still very much in the early evolutionary phase, and they have a long way to go. There's a tons of excitement and surprises around every corner in that part of the business—and I love that.

So while in some sectors, things are looking a bit stale, I'm really happy to see that the games industry is diverse enough that we can look to other areas for cutting-edge stuff while we wait for the next generation of consoles. That's the first time I ever remember that happening—and that's a great thing.

Jaz Rignall
VP, Content

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MEET THE GAMERS

Jaz Rignall VP, Content

Having spent a lot of time flying around the country this month, Jaz's gaming has been mostly mobile. In his bag—an iPad, 3DS, and a netbook, which have thankfully helped him avoid having to watch the diabolically bad movies currently being shown on various airlines.

Now playing: *Dead or Alive: Dimensions, Dungeons & Dragons: Daggerdale, Dirt 3*

Twitter: @jazrignall

Karen Chu Art Director

Karen has been baking up a storm. She wants to eventually master the art of making empanadas, open up an empanada bakery, and call it "ChuChu Pockets."

Now playing: *Prose with Bros, inFamous 2*

Twitter: @momopeche

Jason Wilson Group Managing Editor

With *Dark Souls* on the horizon, Jason's decided it's time to man up and finish *Demon's Souls*. Sadly, the Adjudicator has reduced him to a pile of whimpering putty.

Now playing: *The Witcher 2, Civilization V, Catherine, Demon's Souls, L.A. Noire, Radiant Historia, 100 Rogues*

Twitter: @jason_wilson

Tom Price Executive Editor

San Francisco summers are not known for their sunlight and heat (in fact, it's usually socked in with fog), so this is the season for staying in, staying warm, and catching up on some games. Tom is hoping it's perfect weather for a long weekend with *L.A. Noire*.

Now playing: *L.A. Noire, MLB11: The Show, Civilization: Revolution* (iOS), *Sword & Sworcery*

Twitter: @Tomelet

Justin Haywald Executive Editor

Justin found a hat store and has started wearing Stetsons and fezzes into the office. As least the *Dr. Who* fanatic hasn't discovered the bowtie store yet....

Now playing: *Shadows of the Damned, Red Faction: Armageddon* multiplayer

Twitter: @justinhaywald

Patrick Shaw Senior Editor

Call of Duty: Black Ops' Call of Dead forces players to war against horror legend George A. Romero, which might as well be asking Patrick to saw off his favorite foot with a rusty butter knife. But after fighting zombie Romero (and repeatedly being slaughtered by him), he's realized what a ruthless prick he can really be.

Now playing: *Gears of War 3 Beta, Dead Nation, Nintendogs + Cats, Capcom Arcade* (iPhone)

Twitter: @patrickshaw

Will Herring Reviews Editor

Will is just now realizing that he's not once seen the other inhabitants of his new apartment building. He's dreading some *Twilight Zone*-ish twist where all his neighbors turn out to be zombies, ghosts, and/or plant people from another dimension.

Now playing: *L.A. Noire, Portal 2, Baldur's Gate II, Alice: Madness Returns*

Twitter: @gp_greyscale

Chris Holt Sr. Associate Editor

After playing *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*, I've begun to see real-world institutions as ways to augment my powers. Do yoga = +1 agility, run 4 miles = +4 endurance, etc. My optometrist, however, wouldn't augment my contact lenses with a sniper scope.

Now playing: *L.A. Noire, Deus Ex, Duke Nukem Forever, Soul Calibur IV*

Twitter: @BicycleSquid

Kat Bailey Associate Editor

When it comes to the Kirk vs. Picard debate, Kat goes the third way and sides with Spock. It's the ears.

Now playing: *L.A. Noire, The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time 3D*

Twitter: @the_katbot

Ray Barnholt Associate Editor

Ray can't understand why his colleagues dread E3 so much. A week of excitement can do you some good! He does hang on to that excitement a little too long afterward, though—no one should be showering with their badge on.

Now playing: *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time 3D, Catherine, No More Heroes: Heroes' Paradise*

Twitter: @rdb_aaa

Chris Parisi Video Producer

Chris went home the other day intending to make tacos. Instead, he just had a heaping bowl of refried beans and ground beef covered in melted cheese. Chris passed out on the couch and had wonderfully fat, greasy dreams....

Now playing: *Portal 2, Chess Pro Lite*

Twitter: @chrisparisi

McKinley Noble Staff Editor

McKinley's been a little obsessed with the 1940s ever since *L.A. Noire* arrived in the *GamePro* office. Now he's shopping for fedoras, listening to Frank Sinatra, and watching *A League of Their Own* almost every day after work. But at least he's stopped wearing those weird Harry Potter cloaks.

Now playing: *L.A. Noire, Pokémon White, Dick Tracy* (Sega Genesis)

Twitter: @KenTheGreat1

Andrew Yang Sr. Graphic Designer

Andrew wants nothing more than to be reincarnated as a jellyfish deep in the Mariana Trench. The idea of floating in solitude through the peaceful darkness of the sea, surrounded only by the snowflakes of poo from all the fishes in the ocean, seems like a utopia compared to his life right now.

Now playing: *League of Legends*

Twitter: @stitchmind

Will Chu Graphic Designer

Will is catching up on *Mad Men*. He's so far loving the new SCDP look. Mid-century modern furniture and Helvetica posters on the wall?! F*** yeah! The new agency never looked so good! Sadly, watching so much *Mad Men* has made him subconsciously pick up smoking again.

Now playing: *The PSN waiting game*

Twitter: @ashjaw

Q of the MONTH

This month, **Bethesda** Vice President of Public Relations **Pete Hines** wants to know:

WHAT'S THE BEST GAME YOU'VE EVER PLAYED THAT NOBODY ELSE PLAYED/HEARD OF/BOUGHT—WELL, OR AT LEAST HARDLY ANYONE ELSE DID?

RAY BARNHOLT

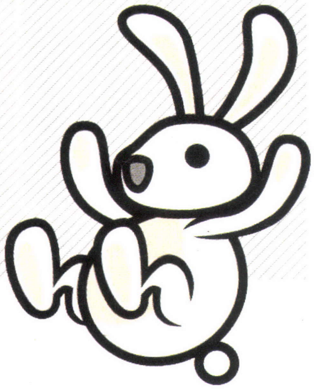
MY SUMMER VACATION

is a Japanese PS1 game. You're a little boy at his cousins' house in the country, and you can explore the woods, chat with the family, or have beetle fights with the neighbor boys. I love games with exploration and realistic scenery, and this has it in spades.

JUSTIN HAYWALD

RHYTHM TENGOKU

was developed too late in the GBA's life to make a Western release, but this "prequel of sorts" to the equally excellent Rhythm Heaven is the best music game you never played. It's not too late, though; simple, intuitive controls make this a very import-friendly game.



TOM PRICE

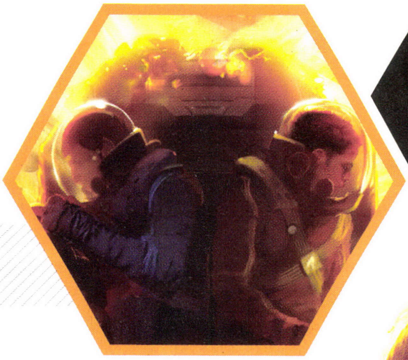
BATTLESTATIONS: PACIFIC

It's hardly an obscure title, but I'll be damned if I know anyone in the industry who continued to play it after they reviewed it. I'll admit that I am a bit of a WWII history nut, especially the Pacific theater stuff—no naval war was ever fought like that, and none will ever again—and I will also admit that the game has its flaws. But to this day it can easily suck me into a large combat operation involving carrier-launched bombers and fighters, heavily armed battleships and cruisers, and sneaky submarines. The way it mixes its action and strategy elements is at the core of what I love about how games in general—that satisfying intersection between my intellect and my reaction times.

JAZ RIGNALL

SCARABAEUS

There's an old Commodore 64 game I loved playing a long, long time ago that nobody seems to remember. It's called *Scarabaeus*, and it was created by Andromeda Software, who I believe were based in Hungary. It was a maze-chase game in 3D that was extremely tense and gave the player some genuine frights if you played it with the sound turned up and the lights off. Of course, it looks totally hokey by today's standards, but at the time, I thought it was seriously cool.



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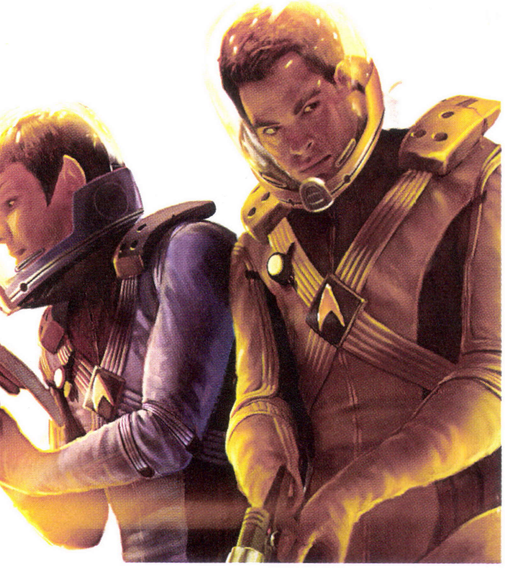


KAREN SAYS...

Before J.J. Abrams' *Star Trek* movie, my only close contact with the franchise was the "warp core breach" (a fishbowl filled with a frightening composite of random alcohol) I ordered at the now-defunct *Star Trek Experience* bar in Las Vegas.

Though I did not necessarily *enjoy* or even remember my Vegas brush-in with *Trek*, I did thoroughly love the *Star Trek* movie. For me, it was a great buddy-cop adventure movie... in space!

So for this month's cover, game artist **Craig Sellars** has translated all of those elements into a rather breath-taking image that highlights the two different personalities as well as conveying a sense of teamwork...which should come in handy when facing a fiery hot mess of cosmic proportions.

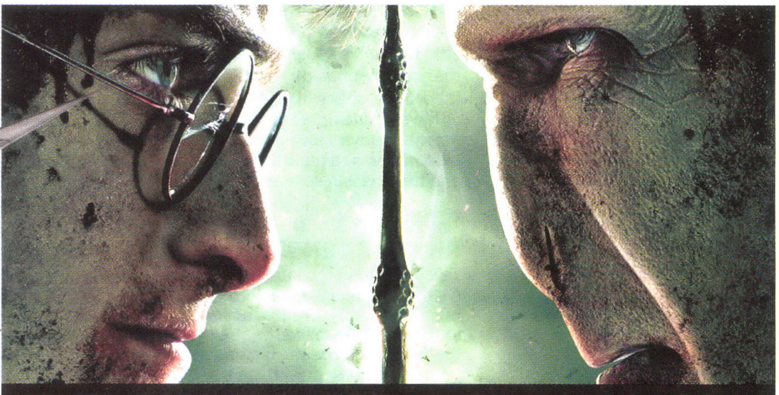
EVENT CALENDAR

7/4/11 Don't forget to celebrate our nation's independence with hot dogs and illegal fireworks. U-S-A! U-S-A!

7/5/11 The best DVD title of the year, ***Hobo with a Shotgun***, releases today. Also, *Earth Defense Force: Insect Armageddon* for PS3 and Xbox 360.

7/12/11 *NCAA Football 2012* kicks off today. If you're not a football fan, grab ***Robot Chicken Star Wars: Episode III*** on Blu-ray instead.

7/14/11 If you're in Japan, be sure to pick up your copy of ***Star Fox 64 3D*** for your Nintendo 3DS.



7/15/11 ***Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2*** closes out the behemoth franchise. No spoilers in case you haven't read the book that came out four years ago.

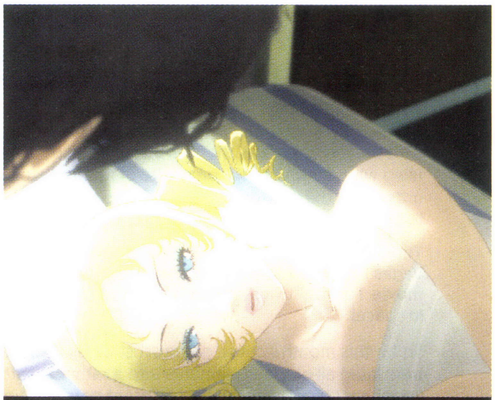
JULY 2011

There really is no cure for the summertime blues, especially when there aren't many new games coming out. You could see the new* Transformers *movie or* The Smurfs *in 3D. Maybe you should just go outside.

Release dates are subject to change.

7/19/11 Get ready for some WWII alternate history with the debut of ***Captain America: Super Soldier*** from Sega, three days before the new movie. For the geeks: *Doctor Who* Season 6 on DVD and Blu-ray.

7/21/11 San Diego Comic-Con starts today and goes through July 24. It's become one of the major events for video-game nerds and comic-book fans alike, of which there's plenty of crossover. Don't forget to pick up your cosplay at the cleaners.



7/26/11 ***Catherine***, the game about sexy girls and goats in neckties, lands on PS3 and 360 today. Also out, *The Cursed Crusade* (PS3, 360, PC).

MIDNIGHT IS UPON YOU!

MGC is hitting the road again and we're coming to see if you have what it takes. You better bring it!

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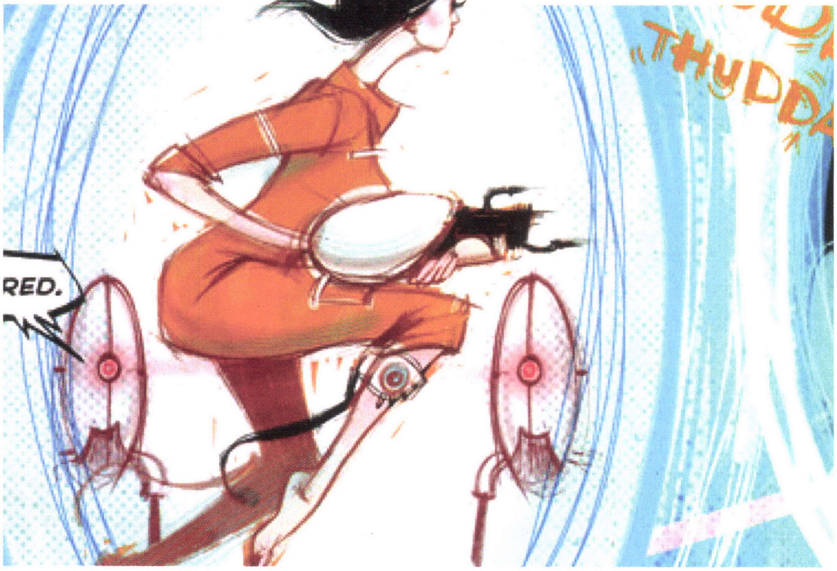
WITTY REPARTEE, ANGRY TIRADES, AND A SMATTERING OF GOVERNMENT SECRETS.

August Letter of the Month



Hear Me Roar

"[**Chris Holt's** *'Portal's* GLaDOS as Feminist Icon'] made me think more about your theories on Chell's and GlaDOS's traditional and feminist roles, respectively, especially in relation to the game's last scene. GlaDOS uses more traditional—phallic—projectile weapons, which Chell absorbs and redirects through her "portals," defeating GlaDOS. Is this a triumph of traditional femininity over GlaDOS's use of phallic weaponry?

And how do the turrets fit into this, as they are the only other things in ***Portal*** that might qualify as 'characters' that you haven't mentioned."➔

—elisd42/ Forum Rank: Apprentice / Posts: 0

[HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?
DROP US A LINE AT FEEDBACK@GAMEPRO.COM]

➔OUR RESPONSE

"Thanks for chiming in, elisd42—your insight is intriguing, backed by verifiable fact, and most importantly, free of *Portal 2* spoilers. While none of Valve's FPS slate falls in line with the modern-day warfare games dominating the sales charts, *Portal* is the company's most experimental work and the most likely source of interindustry commentary. At the very basest level, casting the silent and proficient Chell as the hero is a major statement against the smack-talking marines you see everywhere else. But the many gender-infused elements you mentioned can't just be coincidence.

As for the turrets, they seem to be in the realm of gender confusion, given their confused inflection and comparatively diminutive nature among the game's enemies. That's just our wild guess. But we're glad there are games like *Portal* to keep us talking."

GamePro.com Poll

How can Sony make up for the PSN security breach?

As long as my personal data is secure, I'm OK with the downtime.
46%

A free game might soften the blow....
29%

They can't—this is the company's death knell.
17%

Company products won't sway me. I need a cash settlement.
8%

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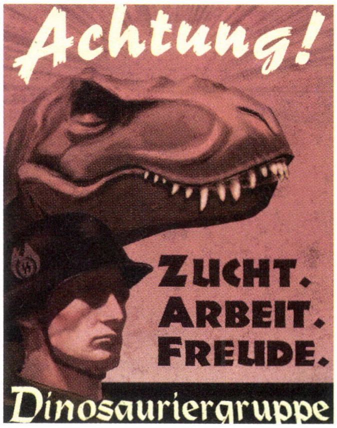
ON THE **GAMEPRO.COM** FORUMS

"3DS...SO, WHAT DO YOU THINK?"

"I played the 3DS for the very first time today at a kiosk at GameStop, and I think I'm in love. I was just browsing when 'she'—the 3DS—caught my eye. She was beautiful, mounted against the wall, her radiance shining through the undeserving hollows of the video-game retailer. At first I was shy, but a little voice whispered in my ear, telling me things would be alright. The moment I turned it on, I thought I heard angels singing. *Super Street Fighter IV 3D* popped on, and I was immediately enchanted by the godly 3D effects and graphics. The slide stick worked much better and was much more durable than that awful nub on the PSP. The controls were responsive, the graphics were ridiculously gorgeous, and, of course, the fighting was the shiz. I had to practically pry myself away from playing. But alas, I had to bid farewell to my love and go about my business. Now I need one more than ever."

—gamiac2002 / Forum Rank: End Boss / Posts: 12,798

"My eyes were hurting worse than when I tried the Virtual Boy."
—Demarius_b / Forum Rank: Hardcore / Posts: 5,007



"NAZI DINOSAUR GAME TO BE RELEASED"

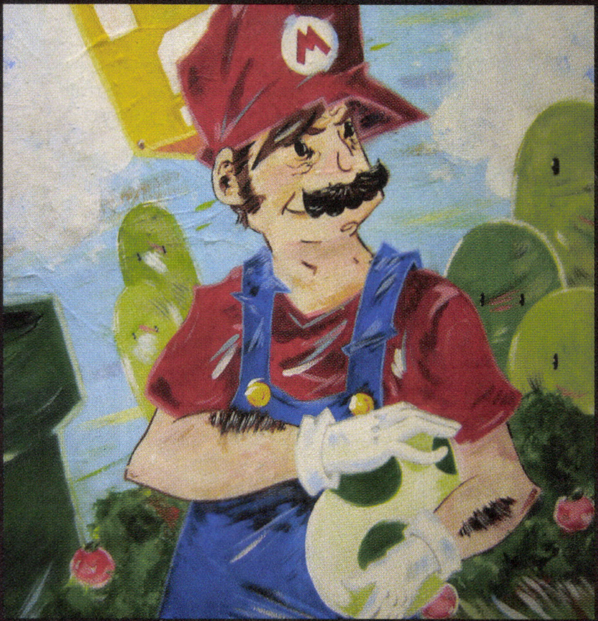
In *Dino D-Day*, the year is 1942. Adolf Hitler has succeeded in resurrecting dinosaurs. The reptilian horde has trampled Europe and the Mediterranean. Can nothing stop the Nazi's dinosaur army?

"Please let the final boss be Hitler riding a T-rex...."
—Fat_Bot / Forum Rank: End Boss / Posts: 14,915

"Probably the greatest premise for a video game I've seen since...ever?"
—iamsizzlor / Forum Rank: Elite Gamer / Posts: 6,594

Art Attack

Our Art Attack winner this month is Tristan Walsh, who painted this unique interpretation of Mario. Here are a few of the inspirations and anecdotes that came from Tristan's creative process:



→ "I've always been influenced heavily by Saturday-morning cartoons and comics. Bold outlines and vivid colors always tickle my fancy. I've developed an art style after growing up with these influences, so I suppose that I just ended up applying it to a favorite character of mine."

→ "I included the egg because I had just finished *Super Mario World* on the Super NES before I did this. I also like how simply including the egg in such a memorable location from the game lets anyone viewing the piece draw their own conclusions or recall happy memories."

→ "I'd love to do a Luigi piece to match this, only it would be darker with heavy emphasis on his stint in *Luigi's Mansion* to contrast with Mario."

→ "The other props were included to help flavor the piece, but I really love those little hills with eyes. They were always the coolest."

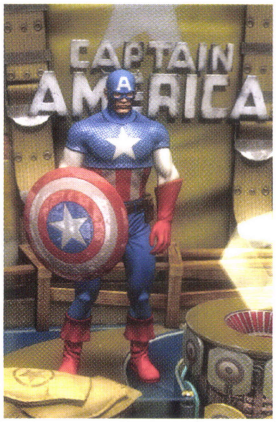
Want to get your art featured in *GamePro*? Send your art to us via feedback@gamepro.com or mail it to *GamePro* Art Attack, 501 2nd Street, Suite 500, San Francisco, CA, 94107. In either case, be sure to include your e-mail address so that we can contact you to chat about your work!

SWAG ME OUT!

WHEN I SAY "SPAWN," YOU SAY "POINT!"

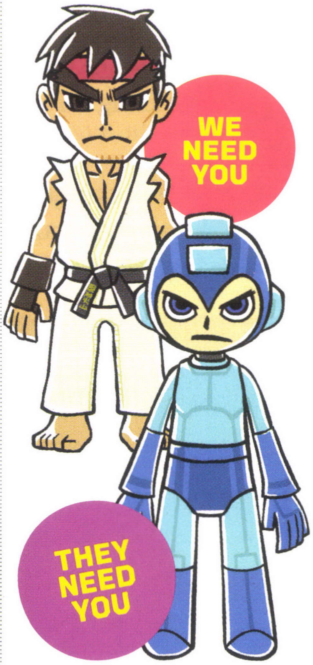
Spawn pt.

OUR MONTHLY POTPOURRI OF WHAT'S COOL, WEIRD, EXCITING, FUNNY, AND JUST DOWNRIGHT AWESOME.



MARVEL PINBALL DLC

Zen Studios has been updating their virtual table for *Marvel Pinball* (PSN, XBLA) with a bunch of new DLC, including this massively detailed *Captain America* table. Be on the lookout for *Fantastic Four* and *Thor* boards as well. Better than a real machine.



> "I DON'T THINK THE GREATEST MOTIVATION FOR PEOPLE IS MONEY. IT'S TO FEEL NEEDED—AND I DIDN'T FEEL NEEDED."
>
> —KEIJI INAFUNE, SPEAKING ABOUT LEAVING CAPCOM TO KOTAKU.

THE EL SHADDAI MEMES YOU MISSED OUT ON

Oddly enough, Ignition's *El Shaddai: Ascension of the Metatron* gained an Internet following well before it came out. After last year's debut trailer, nerds in Japan pounced on the game's more absurd parts, churning out parody after crazy parody. Here are three pillars of the insanity:

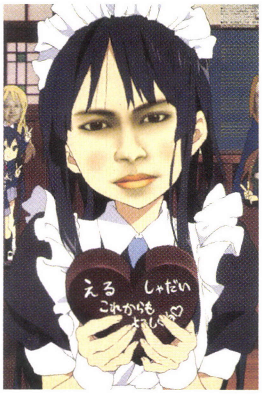
// "NO PROBLEM, EVERYTHING'S FINE."

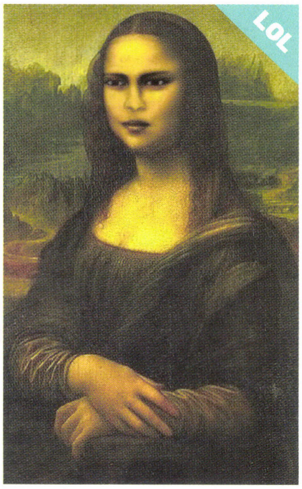
This single quote was the meme catalyst; while not inherently funny, it's a treasured nonsequitur, like when you thought "The cake is a lie" was comedy gold.

// THE HOMEMADE TRAILER

A real-life homage to the trailer, with tongues firmly in cheek. A tour de force.

// AND, OF COURSE, THE PHOTOSHOPS





FOR DAILY UPDATES, FOLLOW US AT TWITTER.COM/GAMEPRO

"I BELIEVE WE'RE RAPIDLY DECAYING AS A NATION. NONE OF THESE GUYS APPEAR TO WORK. NONE OF THESE GUYS EVEN APPEAR TO BE IN REALITY...THEIR POOR PARENTS ARE LIVING WITH THESE KIDS. THERE'S A PROBLEM—I'D RATHER BE ON DRUGS THAN ON THESE GAMES." —HOWARD STERN

// GP SAYS: This coming from a guy whose idea of a game is throwing bologna at strippers' asses? You're out of your element, Howie.

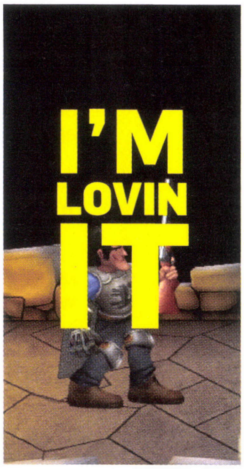
BEST WORST WRITING IN A GAME: ALIEN JIHAD

SOME HIGHLIGHTS:

- THE WHOLE WORLD IS AT PEACE UNTIL ALIENS FROM "PLANET VIRGINOPOLI" INVADE THE EARTH.
- SAUDI ARABIA HAS BECOME THE "WORLD'S BIGGEST PROPONENT OF MINISKIRTS."
- THE LEADER OF THE BRITISH NAZI PARTY IS NAMED "DICK PUFFIN."
- "GREEDY" WALL STREET INVESTMENT BANKERS HAVE BEEN TRANSFORMED INTO ALIEN CLONES. A SQUAD OF DANISH CARTOONISTS, OF COURSE, IS SENT IN TO SAVE THE DAY.

(iPhone, iPad, Android, PC, Consoles TBA)

MORE STUFF LIKE THIS, PLEASE



ARMY OF DARKNESS: DEFENSE (iPHONE, iPAD)

Backflip Studios's castle-defense game is based on the third groovy film in Bruce Campbell's cult-favorite *Evil Dead* trilogy.

// GP SAYS: We"d definitely like to see more games based on older badass movies, especially if they star Bruce Campbell. How's about a *Maniac Cop* game, hmm?

3 WARS THAT DIDN'T LAST AS LONG AS THE PSN OUTAGE

// INDO-PAKISTANI WAR OF 1971 —13 DAYS

In December 1971, India and Pakistan fought a bloody border battle with roots in the Bangladesh liberation movement. As a result, Bangladesh won its independence.

// SIX-DAY WAR (1967)—6 DAYS

This war between Israel and the combined forces of Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and troops from many other Arab nations redrew the boundary lines of the Middle East, reverberating in the region's political climate to this day.

ANGLO-ZANZIBAR WAR (1896) —45 MINUTES

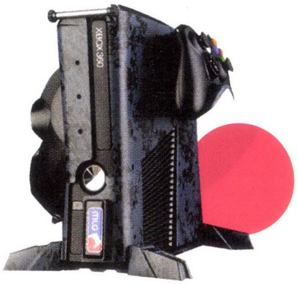
Clocked in around the same duration as the average PS3 system update.

CIVILIZATION WORLD ISN'T YOUR STANDARD GAME OF CIV

PUZZLES! You move jumbled pieces to unveil a masterpiece. Put the pieces in the right places and you earn culture, which helps make Great People appear.

TEAMWORK! You expand your Civ with the help of other members of your empire, working together to research new techs.

MOVE BUILDINGS! You may move houses and other structures in your city, though some may lose upgrades when you do so.



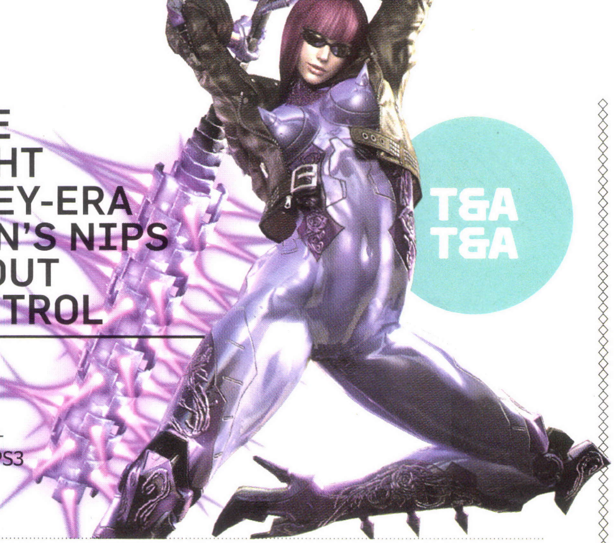
Calibur 11 Vault Cases

We remain wary of "blinging out" our consoles, but encasing them in something that looks like powered armor with accoutrements like a controller-holder molded into the side (genius) looks kind of cool to us. Visit calibur11.com for more sexy models.

>> FUN FACT ABOUT KAT: SHE HAS A BLACK BELT IN TAE KWON DO AND CAN SINGLE-HANDEDLY TAKE DOWN ALL THE HATERS.

CONTINUE >>

AND WE THOUGHT CLOONEY-ERA BATMAN'S NIPS WERE OUT OF CONTROL



T&A T&A

Meet Mathilda, one of the characters in Sega's upcoming *Anarchy Reigns* for PS3 and Xbox 360.

CELEBRATE THE SPIRIT OF WIZARDRY

Wizardy: The Lost Labyrinth of Souls is out. Are you looking for more old-fashioned dungeon-crawling? Here are three to delve into:

1) ETRIAN ODYSSEY I-III (DS)

2) THE DARK SPIRE (DS)

3) MIGHT AND MAGIC: WORLD OF XEEN (PC, GOOD OLD GAMES.COM)

WHITE KNIGHT CHRONICLES II: A BYGONE ERA

HOW TIMES HAVE CHANGED SINCE 2006. Back then, the PS3 was being hyped as the next big thing in gaming, and *White Knight Chronicles* was supposed to lead the charge for Japanese RPGs. One delay followed another, though, and one day we all woke up to discover that it was 2008, JRPGs were passé, and *White Knight Chronicles* had become a mediocre multiplayer RPG.

Level-5 has done their best to make amends with *White Knight Chronicles II* by tweaking the combat to emphasize positioning while making it possible for your player avatar to take on the giant Knight form previously reserved for the main characters. They even threw in an updated version of the original game for good measure, just in case you happened to miss it the first time.

Worth it? That's up to you. But times sure have changed. *—Kat Bailey*

BUTCHERING ZOMBIES FEELS SO GOOD

THIS GIRL!

THE BUZZ SURROUNDING DEAD ISLAND, DEEP SILVER'S FIRST-PERSON ZOMBIE-SLAUGHTERING GAME, has been extremely positive ever since it was first revealed. But polished trailers are one thing, and actually playing a game is another. We recently got the chance to play *Dead Island*, and it's every bit as cool as we'd hoped. Here are four of our favorite things you can do to undead aggressors:

- INTENTIONALLY RUN THEM OVER WITH A TRUCK.
- USE A CUSTOM-BUILT ELECTRIFIED MACHETE TO SLICE SIZZLING WOUNDS INTO THEM.
- THROW AN EXPLODING KNIFE INTO THEM AND THEN WATCH THEM BLOW UP.
- BASH THEIR UGLY FACES IN WITH A BASEBALL BAT EMBEDDED WITH NAILS.

PLAY NEW GAMES FOR $2 A DAY

redbox®

MOVIE DISTRIBUTION SERVICE AND NETFLIX COMPETITOR Redbox is now allowing you to check out video-game new releases for PS3, Xbox 360, and Wii for just 50 cents more than Blu-ray movie rentals. We wonder how many games it's possible to complete in 24 hours...

> "I THINK THAT THE AMOUNT OF VENTURE THAT'S BEING POURED IN, IN GENERAL, THAT'S MOST OF THE VIDEO-GAME INDUSTRY INVESTMENT. AS FAR AS I KNOW RIGHT NOW, IT'S GOING INTO PURE SOCIAL GAMING. IT LOOKS LIKE MARKETING TO ME. IT DOESN'T LOOK LIKE REAL GAMING."

—DENIS DYACK, CREATOR OF TOO HUMAN, TALKING TO INDUSTRYGAMERS.COM ON HIS DOUBTS ABOUT THE SUSTAINABILITY OF THE SOCIAL-GAMES INDUSTRY.

// GP SAYS: We're looking forward to seeing Dyack's new Facebook game, *CyberVikingville*, by E3 2012 at the latest.

TURTLE BEACH GAMING CANS LOOK AND SOUND SWEET

LADIES LOVE IT
AMIRITE, FELLAS

Turtle Beach has recently announced a slew of new headsets for the gaming enthusiast. But the one that's got our ear is the Z6A, a pair of 5.1 surround sound babies that we can't wait to wrap around our noggins. Check out www.turtlebeach.com for more info.

DANCING WITH THE (NINJA) STARS

← THIS IS A WILL HERRING PUNDUCTION

DUMBEST NAME FOR A GAME AWARD

BABY NINJA DANCE

OFFICIAL ITUNES DESCRIPTION
READS: "DANCE LIKE BABY NINJA!"
PLATFORMS: IPHONE/IPAD ($.99)
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

MEET THE PUPPY

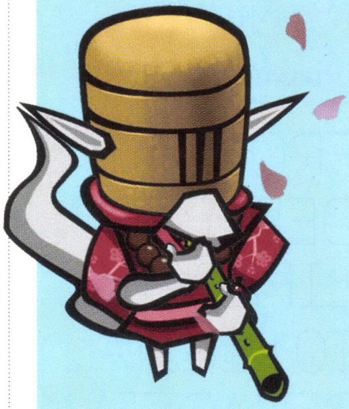
➡ Konami's over-the-top horror-action game *NeverDead* showcases some truly repugnant beasties, such as the Puppy (above). It kind of looks the offspring of an overfed pug and the Sarlacc pit monster from *Return of the Jedi*, don't you think?

SKYLANDERS: SPYRO'S ADVENTURE

Who wouldn't want to play with a video game and a toy at the same time? The plastic component of the new *Spyro* game is a figurine that plugs into a thingy and carries saved info about unique characters into the game. We like the idea. Can someone make an awesome *G.I. Joe* game like this, please?

DEVELOPER SPOTLIGHT

HAUNTED TEMPLE STUDIO



WHO? Jake Kazdal, proprietor, director, producer, lead designer, artist, etc.

WHAT? *Swords of the Samurai*, an upcoming turn-based strategy game featuring cute undead soldiers from feudal Japan.

In addition to Kazdal, *Swords of the Samurai* is also being made with two developers who have their own studios: Borut Pfeifer (Plush Apocalypse) and Ben Vance (Buffalo Vision).

Kazdal is hardly some unknown indie developer. In fact, he's got an impressive *curriculum vitae* of games:

- BLACKLIGHT: TANGO DOWN (2010)
- COMMAND & CONQUER 4: TIBERIAN TWILIGHT (2010)
- BOOM BLOX (2008)
- SPACE CHANNEL 5: PART 2 (2002)
- REZ (2001)
- SPACE CHANNEL 5 (1999)
- TWISTED EDGE: EXTREME SNOWBOARDING (1998)
- SPIDER (1996)
- BRAIN LORD (1994)
- ILLUSION OF GAIA (1993)

FOLLOW THEM:
Jake Kazdal: @jkooza
Borut Pfeifer: @plushapo
Ben Vance: @buffalovision

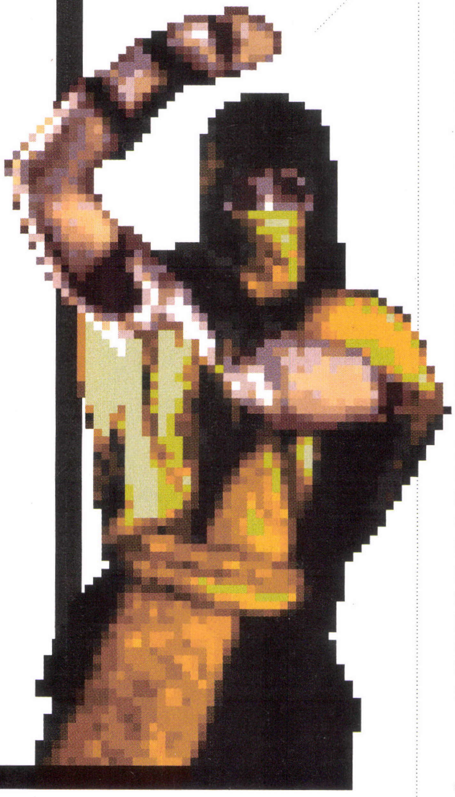
>> STUPID THINGS WE HEAR IN THE OFFICE: "I'VE GOT TO STOP EATING BBQ CHICKEN AND CARROT CAKE FOR BREAKFAST." —MCKINLEY NOBLE

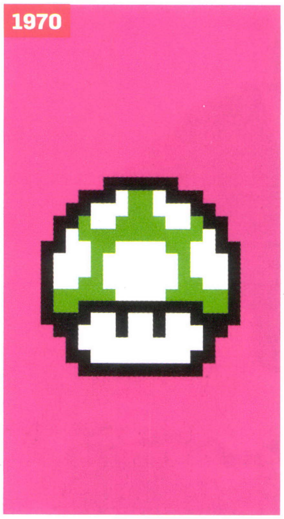
THEN & NOW

// DEATH IN GAMES

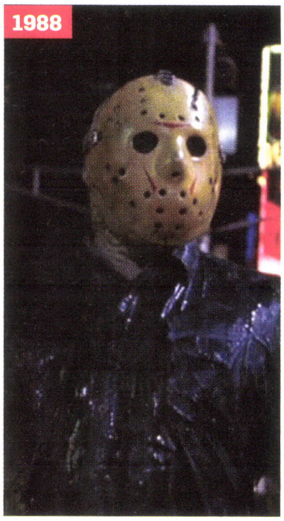
FROM DEPLETED LIFEBARS TO DIGITAL DECAPITATIONS.

FATALITIES!!! I INVENTED THOSE, RIGHT?




1970

CATS HAVE NINE LIVES: GAMERS HAVE INFINITE
Long before it becomes synonymous with Mario's mushroom power-up, the term "1-up" actually originates from pinball. 1-ups, or extra lives, reflect the idea that players have a set number of virtual lives, which they can often obtain more of via a special item.

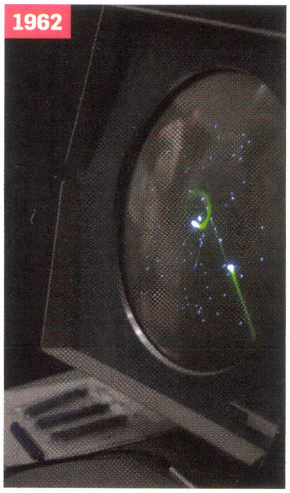

1988

JASON VS. SUBTLETY
The legendarily wretched video-game adaptation of 1980s slasher flick *Friday the 13th* lands on the NES, killing the traditional "game over" in favor of hilariously mean-spirited messages like "You and Your Family Are Dead!" Years later, it's followed by *Resident Evil*'s similarly blunt "You Are Dead."

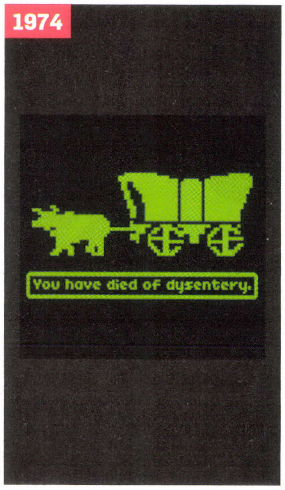
1996

THERE ARE NO HEALTH BARS IN REAL LIFE
Capcom's *Resident Evil* series rethinks death by substituting your typical health bar for an EGK meter—as well as decreased mobility for players as their injuries and oozing zombie bites become more severe.

THEN


1962

IN SPACE NO ONE CAN HEAR YOU DIE
One of the first graphical video games ever created, Steve Russell's *Space War!* (1963) is credited as the first game where death is a possible fate for players who attack each other in one of two spaceships: "the needle" or "the wedge."

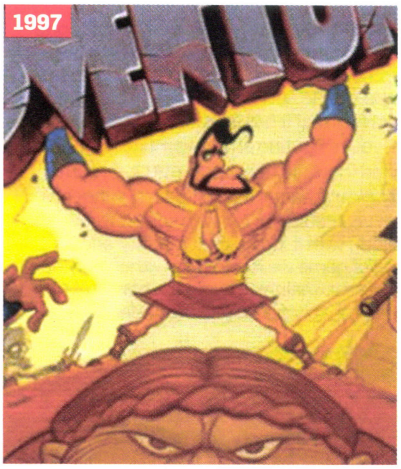


1974

I HAVE TYPHOID FEVER?
The educational title *The Oregon Trail* provides students with an interactive representation of what life was like for a 19th century settler heading West. It's one of the first (and only) games where your primary goal is keep everyone from dying from real-life deadly diseases such cholera, typhoid fever, dysentery, and the measles.

1992

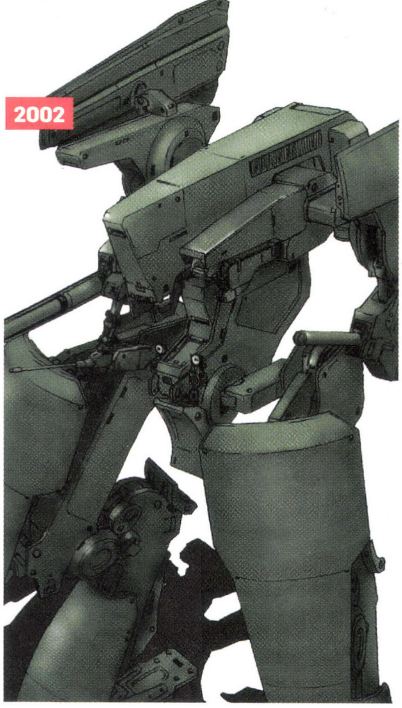
THE BRINGER OF DEATH
Mortal Kombat takes the concept of death in games beyond empty health meters by allowing players to determine exactly how their adversary will meet their maker: Will you knock them into a pit filled with 3-foot-long sharpened spikes or tear their still-beating heart right out of their chest? Decisions, decisions.



1997

INTO THE BOWELS OF ~~HELL~~ HADES

LucasArts' *Herc's Adventures*, a pre-*God of War* tongue-in-cheek take on Greek mythology, puts a novel twist on "dying" in a video game. Instead of losing a life or getting a game-over screen, dying plunges you into the depths of Hades, and you must fight your way out to continue. The more often you die, the deeper you descend into the underworld. A similar nonplayer-controlled event appears later in *God of War*, in which Kratos must fight his way out of Hades and burst forth from his own grave.



2002

INSULT TO FATAL INJURY

Steel Battalion contains one of the harshest consequences for dying in a video game. Failing to eject from your mech before it explodes causes not only death but also the game to delete your entire save file. Ouch.

2004

HALO DIDN'T INVENT EVERYTHING

Contrary to popular belief, the *Halo* franchise isn't the first to feature player health that gradually regenerates (games as far back as the Super NES era had it). *Halo 2*, however, popularized the convention, which appears in countless games today.

NOW

1997

A MATURE TAKE ON LOSS

Much like how Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* rocked film audiences by killing off its female star Janet Leigh within the first 20 minutes, *Final Fantasy VII* is notable for—among many other things—its bold storytelling, in which the protagonist's love interest, Aeris, is tragically slain.

2003

STAY DEAD

Nintendo's tactical-RPG *Fire Emblem* establishes the concept of "permanent death," which means once a character perishes, they're dead for good. It leads the way for more permanent treatments of death in games like *Mass Effect* and *Heavy Rain*.

2004

OUT OF (VIDEO-GAME) BODY EXPERIENCE

Blizzard's *World of Warcraft* presents players with an original take on death. After a character's health reaches zero, the world turns black and white and they can exit their corpse as...a ghost.

FREE 2 PLAY

// ROUNDUP

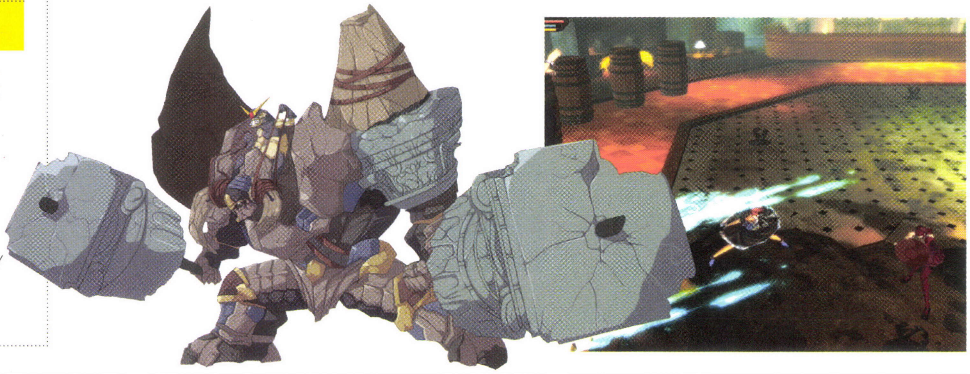
F2P GAMING IS ON THE RISE, PROVING THAT MANY OF THE BEST THINGS IN LIFE REALLY ARE FREE.

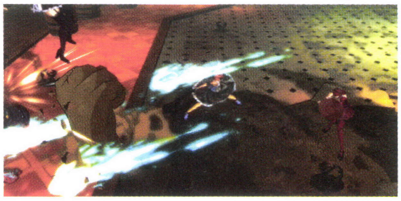
RUSTY HEARTS

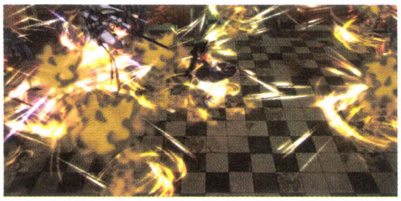
GENRE: HACK-N-SLASH
PUBLISHER: PERFECT WORLD
STATUS: GOING INTO CLOSED BETA IN JULY

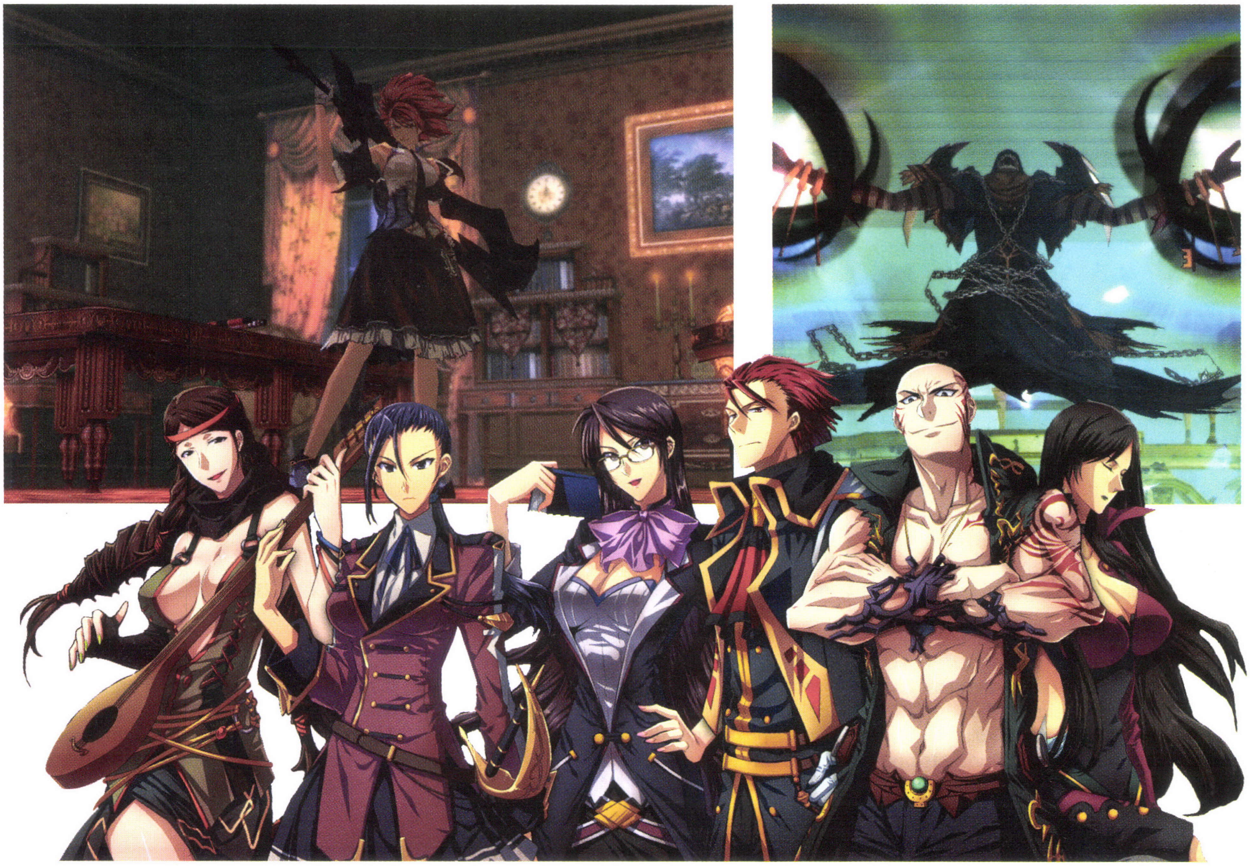
YES, BUT HOW DO THEY MAKE MONEY? DETAILS ON THAT ARE FUZZY AT THIS TIME.

The "action-RPG with anime graphics" setup is one of the most commonly reoccurring subgenres we see when checking out new free-to-play PC games. But something seems to set *Rusty Hearts* apart. Maybe it's the cool name, or that it has a character named "Tude," or that you're fighting an evil vampire king named Lord Vlad (how did they know my chat-room handle?). *Rusty Hearts* has all the fast-paced dungeon-crawling action you could ask for, with some sweet visuals to go along with it. It's quick, it's quirky, and it's exactly the kind of game we like to play without saying we actually bought it (mainly to avoid the teases of our friends who are probably playing it, too, under an alias).







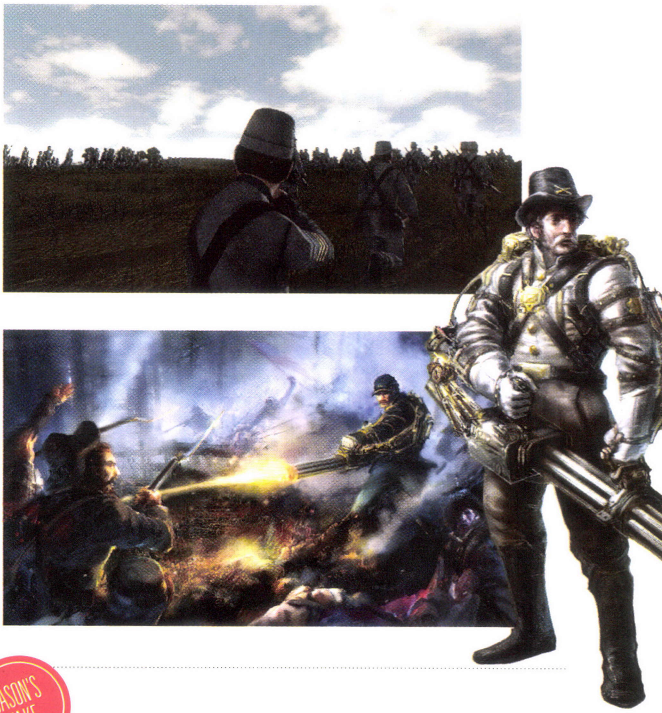


GETTYSBURG: ARMORED WARFARE

GENRE: MMO-RTS
PUBLISHER: PARADOX INTERACTIVE
STATUS: IN DEVELOPMENT

YES, BUT HOW DO THEY MAKE MONEY? THE GAME WILL LAUNCH WITH FOUR MAPS BASED ON FAMOUS BATTLEFIELDS, AND MORE WILL BE AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE.

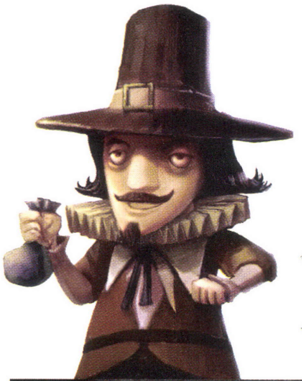
◇ A visitor from the future goes back in time to the Civil War, bringing back advanced technologies that result in turning The War Between the States into a very different conflict, one featuring zeppelins, tanks, and field officers toting mini-Gatling guns. This, I believe, was the original plot of Ken Burns' landmark Civil War miniseries, before the powers that be at PBS stepped in. It's definitely the plot of *Gettysburg: Armored Warfare*, a massively multiplayer real-time strategy game that takes the historically accurate—if boring and slow—weaponry of the period and juices it up, steampunk-style, into large-scale RTS battles across large maps measuring a virtual 9-by-9 kilometers. Purists will undoubtedly chafe at this, so they can play with the anachronisms turned off. But the appeal of this game is its weird historical mish-mash. Confederate zeppelins just seem hilarious to us.



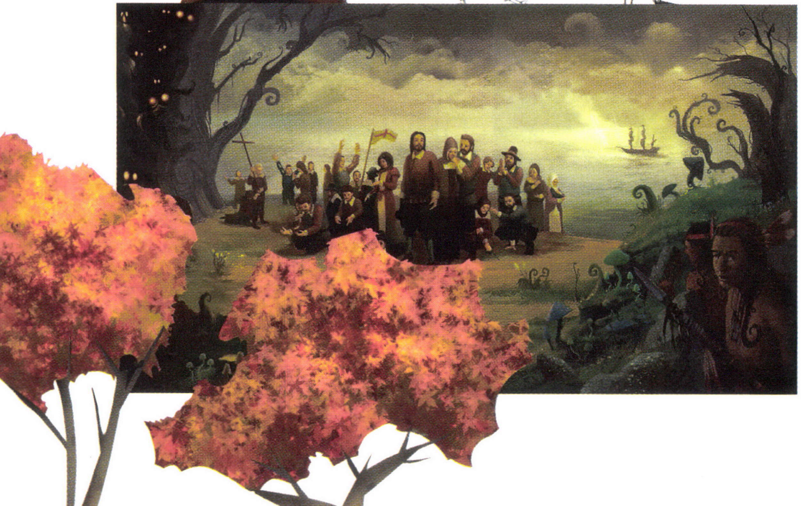
SALEM

GENRE: CRAFTING MMO
PUBLISHER: PARADOX INTERACTIVE
STATUS: IN DEVELOPMENT

YES, BUT HOW DO THEY MAKE MONEY? CRAFTING MEANS ITEMS. ITEMS MEAN MICROTRANSACTIONS. OR NOT. THEY'RE STILL WORKING ON IT.



◇ While it may look a bit like "Burn the Witch at the Stakeville," *Salem* is a pretty interesting setting for a game: It takes place in very early America, a time in which people often believed in the world of the supernatural. Billed as a "crafting MMO," *Salem* requires you—an early settler on the frontiers of wild New England—to start building just a small patch of civilization, mainly to bring some light to the darkness of the wilderness. Otherwise, you might run into some crypto-zoological freak of yesteryear, like the Jersey Devil. So mine that clay, make those bricks, and build a domicile that could turn into a city with the help of the poor, wretched souls who play with you online.



JASON'S TAKE

"FREE TO PLAY" IS NO LONGER A SLUR

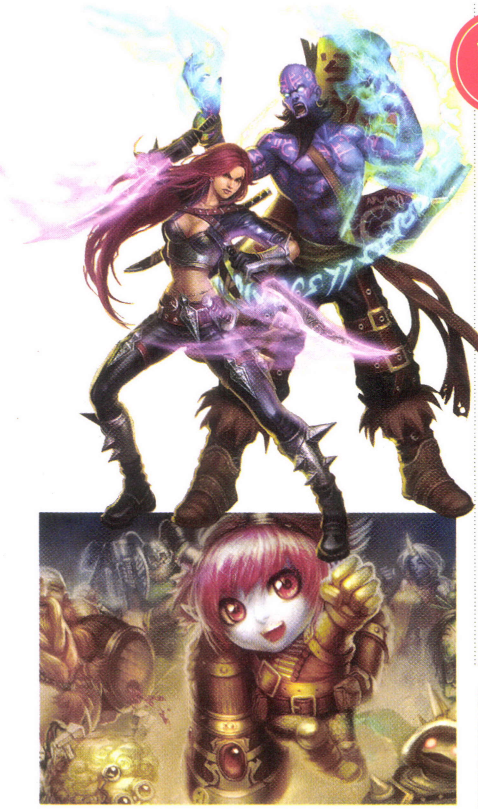
For a long time, gamers looked down at free-to-play games (and many still do). This is changing with games such as *Bloodline Champions* and *World of Tanks* (along with MMOs that have gone from subscriber-based to F2P such as *The Lord of the Rings Online*). These games stand up not just to smaller indie offerings but full-sized titles from the big publishers. *World of Tanks* is one of my favorite games of 2011, and I'm eager to see what else comes from the F2P field.

LEAGUE OF LEGENDS

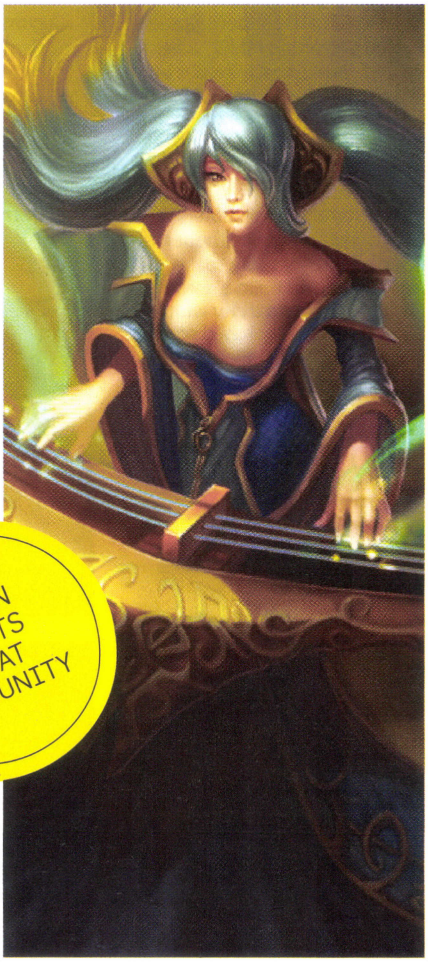
GENRE: DEFENSE OF ANCIENTS-STYLE
PUBLISHER: RIOT GAMES
STATUS: OUT NOW

YES, BUT HOW DO THEY MAKE MONEY? MICROTRANSACTIONS, OR YOU CAN BUY THE COLLECTOR'S PACK FOR $29.99.

◇ It's crazy to think that a player-created multiplayer map of a famous real-time strategy game would spawn an entire subgenre of games. But the Defense of the Ancients map from *Warcraft III* did just that, spawning a slew of other games built around a simple, central concept. One of the most successful games to be inspired by the competitive "tower-defense" gameplay of DOTA-style action, *League of Legends* is going very strong. It features a highly realized fantasy universe, and players must guard a lane choked with a horde of enemy minions with their champions, who have customizable loadouts, weapons, and spellcasting abilities. The amount of depth isn't totally unprecedented, but something about the game has really caught on, and the community that has risen up around it is active and involved.



KNOWN FOR ITS GREAT COMMUNITY



PAT'S TAKE

FREE GAMES... THEY'RE EVERYWHERE

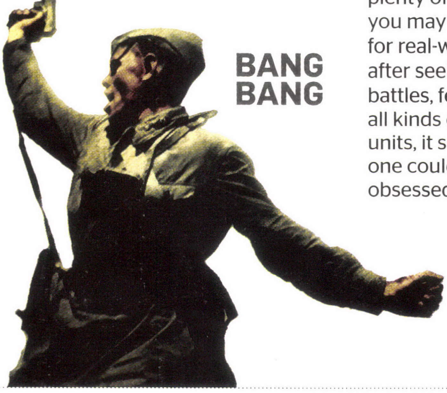
Being a gamer can get insanely expensive. It used to be that you just bought a video game and that was the extent of your monetary investment. Now, with monthly subscription fees for various online services and enticing extras like downloadable content, the amount of dough you're spending on a single game can add up. I'm glad that we're seeing more and more high-quality free-top-play games crop up, and you don't necessarily have be a fan of MMOs to reap the benefits of this free-top-pay revolution—there are plenty of F2P titles worth playing in all genres

> THE UNFORTUNATELY ACRONYMED *LOL* STANDS OUT...IT'S AN EXCELLENT INTRODUCTION TO ITS GENRE AND IS SURPRISINGLY DEEP ONCE YOU GET INTO IT.
>
> *—SCOTT SHARKEY, GAMEPRO.COM*

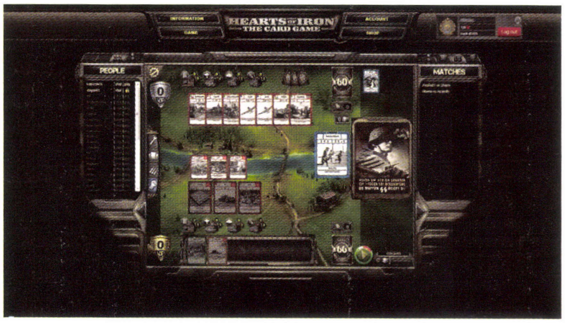
HEARTS OF IRON: THE CARD GAME

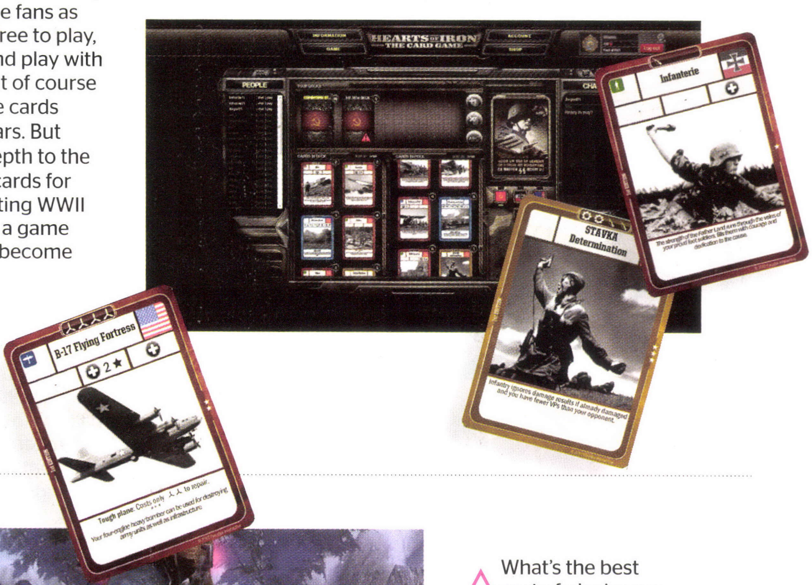
GENRE: CARD GAME
PUBLISHER: PARADOX INTERACTIVE
STATUS: SHOULD BE OUT NOW

YES, BUT HOW DO THEY MAKE MONEY? CARD PACKS.



Some people prefer their collectible card games to be of the paper variety. But true fans of the genre's gameplay can easily be satisfied with a virtual version. And from the looks of it, *Hearts of Iron: The Card Game* is one of those really well-designed trading-card game, with the added bonus of historically detailed subject matter that should satisfy WWII and wargame fans as well. The game is free to play, and you receive and play with plenty of cards, but of course you may buy more cards for real-world dollars. But after seeing the depth to the battles, featuring cards for all kinds of interesting WWII units, it seems like a game one could quickly become obsessed with.

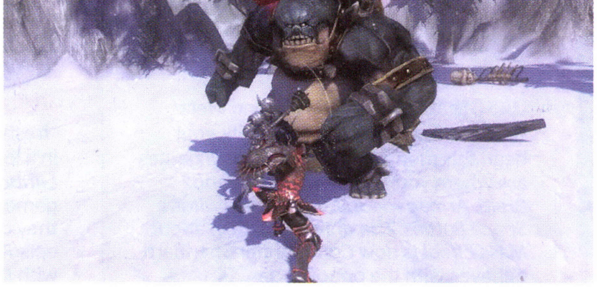

HEARTS OF IRON
THE CARD GAME
PEOPLE
MATCHES


HEARTS OF IRON
THE CARD GAME
PEOPLE
Infanterie
STAVKA Determination
B-17 Flying Fortress
Tough plane: Costs only to repair.
Your four-engine heavy bomber can be used for destroying army units as well as infrastructure.

RAIDERZ

GENRE: MONSTER-HUNTING MMORPG
PUBLISHER: PERFECT WORLD
STATUS: IN CLOSED BETA

YES, BUT HOW DO THEY MAKE MONEY? AGAIN, THEY'RE NOT REALLY SAYING AT THIS POINT. BUT MICROTRANSACTIONS FOR NEW SKILLS AND ITEMS MAKES A LOT OF SENSE.



What's the best part of playing an MMORPG? Raids, of course. Teaming up with friends of different classes and abilities to take on some huge boss monster is at the core of what makes those games so much fun to play. Just ask my man Leroy Jenkins. So a game like *Raiderz* that boils the action down to the more action-packed monster-hunting aspects of the genre has to be appreciated, especially by those who crave this sort of thing. These types of games are generally pretty big in Korea, where their thirst for MMORPGs goes far beyond what *World of Warcraft* has to offer. *Raiderz* features some interesting twists on the formula, including no classes, hundreds of skills you can acquire, and enemies that don't drop loot. You have to see certain NPCs for treasure. But we thought the whole point was loot? Whatever. The monsters and huge skill tree are enough for us to give *Raiderz* a try.

THE DEBATE CLUB

QUESTION

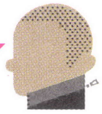
SUMMER INDIE SEASON VS. FALL BLOCKBUSTERS: WHICH IS BETTER?

CONTENDERS

GROUP MANAGER //
JASON WILSON

VS

GP EDITOR //
McKINLEY NOBLE



STANCE

JASON WILSON:
⇢ IS TIRED OF BLOCKBUSTER DEVELOPMENT AND THINKS INDIE AND SMALL DEVS ARE THE FUTURE OF GAMING.

MCKINLEY NOBLE:
⇢ LIVES FOR THE THRILL OF "THE NEXT BIG THING" AND INSISTS TOO MANY BAD INDIE GAMES OUTWEIGH THE GOOD.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

LETS GET READY TO RUMBLE!

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

FIGHT!
Pabst Blue Ribbon BEER
VS
FOUR

ROUND 1

JASON: Summer is becoming one of my favorite seasons for gaming, because it's the one season where the small games get to shine over the bloated blockbusters that flood the fall. I'm getting tired of gaming revolving around the next big thing. It's time to celebrate the little games.

MCKINLEY: No way—it's all about the fall season. In fact, indie games are what's bloating the industry—and with so many of them popping up in apps and Flash games, there's a lot more garbage than gold. High-quality blockbuster releases like *Mass Effect*, *Mario*, and *Metal Gear* are the real breath of fresh air.

ROUND 2

JASON: You just said *Mario* and *Metal Gear* are the fresh air? Did you hit your head this morning? Indie and small games are where you find "fresh air." *Limbo*. *Braid*. *Armageddon Empires*. *Gratuitous Space Battles*. The only thing fresh about *Mass Effect* is how Commander Shephard behaves with the opposite sex.

MCKINLEY: If small, indie games are the "fresh air" of the industry, we're breathing in a lot of junk and not enough good stuff. *Limbo* and *Braid* are rare cases of indie games actually being good, and even then, they didn't last longer than back-to-back episodes of *Two and a Half Men*. At least with *Mass Effect*, I know I'll be entertained for months on end—or a whole year if I try to have sex with all the female characters.

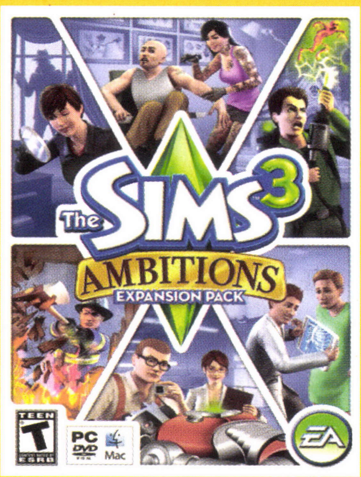
ROUND 3

JASON: But what's better: More of the same, tired stuff—like an overcooked piece of sirloin—or one or two smaller, well-seasoned and properly prepared medallions of gaming goodness? Size isn't everything, and that's another thing to like about indie games—they don't overstay their welcome, allowing me to check out more games.

MCKINLEY: Life's too short to waste on the small stuff. And with the massive, expensive, explosion-filled releases that drop during the fall, that giant piece of sweet sirloin will taste just as good even as it's slowly digesting until next fall. Besides, I'd rather spend three mind-blowing months with a video game that I'll remember forever than have a one-night stand with an indie fling that I'll forget the next morning.

VERDICT

While McKinley continues punching out bears in *Red Dead Redemption* on his HDTV, Jason returns to the archaic looking 8-bit labyrinths of *Dungeon Crawl: Stone Soup*.


The Sims 3
AMBITIONS
EXPANSION PACK
TEEN T
PC DVD
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EA

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PC DVD-ROM ONLINE SOFTWARE
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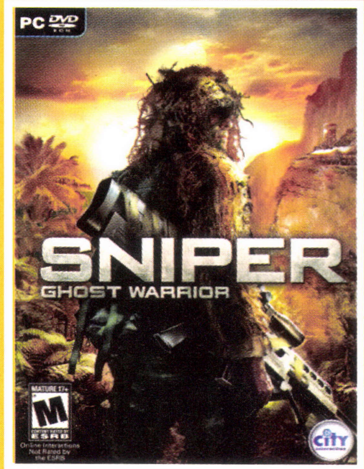
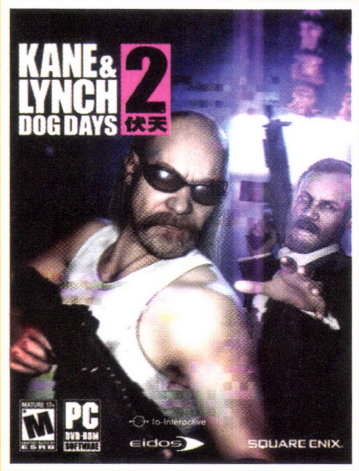
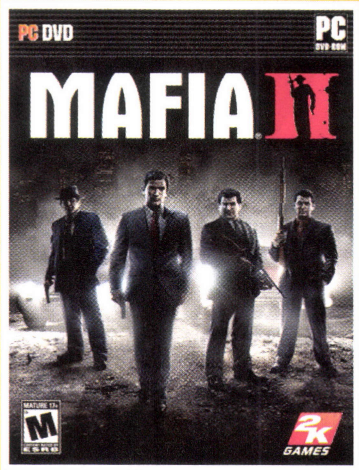
NCSOFT


PC DVD
SNIPER
GHOST WARRIOR
MATURE 17+ M
City Interactive


KANE & LYNCH 2
DOG DAYS
伏天
MATURE 17+ M
PC DVD-ROM SOFTWARE
Io-Interactive
eidos
SQUARE ENIX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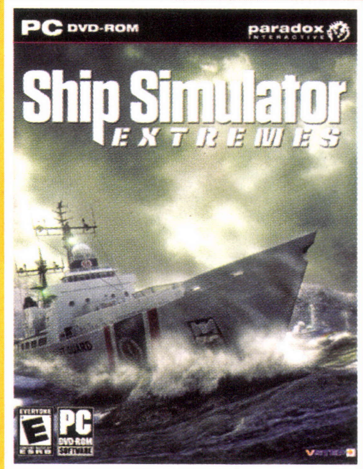
MAFIA II
MATURE 17+ M
2K GAMES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Ship Simulator
EXTREMES
EVERYONE E
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SNAP SHOT

// A PICTURE IS WORTH A 1,000 WORDS, BUT WE'RE NOT GOING TO MAKE YOU READ THAT MANY

IT'S ALMOST TIME FOR US TO MEET UP WITH OUR FURRY FRIENDS IN

THE SIMS 3: PETS

THE LONG-LIVED LIFE SIMULATOR FROM EA.

// PS3, X360, 3DS, PC, MAC

IF THERE'S A GUINNESS WORLD RECORD FOR DLC PACKS, IT'S GOT TO BE HELD BY THE SIMS FRANCHISE.

THE LATEST, ***THE SIMS: 3 PETS***, ADDS THAT ELEMENT TO LIFE-LIVING THAT MOST OF US HAVE ENGAGED IN: **OWNING A PET**.

THIS FALL, YOU'LL BE ABLE TO INCORPORATE CUTE ANIMALS INTO YOUR DAILY VIRTUAL ROUTINE, WITH ALL THE FUN AND COMPANIONSHIP AND NONE OF THE POOP OR ALLERGIES.

THE NOSE KNOWS

One of the functions of the pets is to "sniff out treasures and uncover mysteries."

One of these cats has apparently sniffed out a treasure in that toilet, and the other is uncovering the mystery of what a grown man with a hot wife wearing a sexy teddy is doing in the bubble bath.

WHERE ARE THE MONKEYS?

The complete list of pets you can have includes horses, cats, dogs, birds, lizards, rodents, and snakes. To break that down in order: cool (but exclusive to PC and Mac), sweet, great, OK, no thanks, eww, and no freaking way.

HERE, BOY!

The Sims 3: Pets uses the Kinect's capability to recognize voice commands. On one level, that's pretty cool. But on another, when was the last time your cat did anything you asked it to?

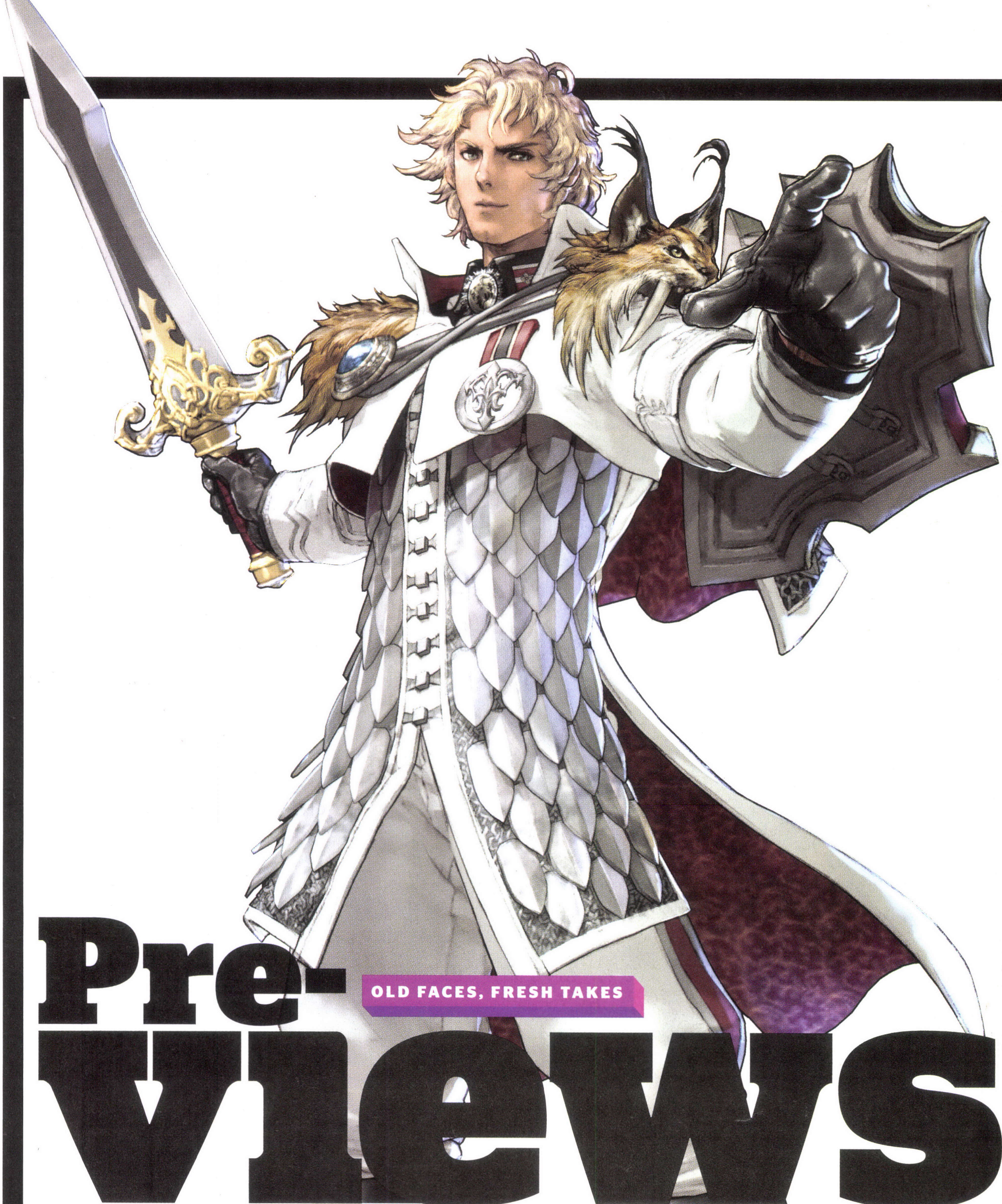
ADOPT-A-PET

In the 3DS version, you can trade pets with other players via StreetPass. Why would I trade these cute little kitties for whatever mangy mongrel you've raised?

Child, please.

HELLO, KITTY.

The pets are playable and can hunt, climb, dig, and more. When it comes to cats, though, I think the "more" refers to sitting around and looking at you like you're the dumbass for digging their poops out of a sandbox. Hey, who owns whom here?



Pre-views

OLD FACES, FRESH TAKES

Reboots and facelifts abound in August's previews. We kick off this month with an homage to the neon- and acid-washed culture and video games of the 1980s in **Retro City Rampage**. We then check in on a more comic-bookish take on **The Darkness II**, Jenova Chen's next multiplayer emotional trip, **Journey**, the dinosaurs of the new **Jurassic Park** adventure game, the reboot to the long-lived horror franchise **Silent Hill**, and the new direction for **Soulcalibur V**.

Above: ***Soulcalibur V*** **reinvigorates its cast with new faces. See the 6-page story on page 40.**

VISIT THE VIDEO GAME VOTERS NETWORK IN THE WEST HALL LOBBY AND GET A

FREE T-SHIRT

ARE YOU TIRED OF GAMES BEING TREATED UNFAIRLY? DO YOU WANT TO HELP DEFEND THE GAMES YOU PLAY AGAINST CENSORSHIP?

Join the Video Game Voters Network (VGVN), the free grassroots coalition that educates and mobilizes the gamer community. The VGVN supports legislative efforts to improve the environment for computer and video game artists and enthusiasts, as well as legislators who ensure games receive the same First Amendment protection as movies, books, and other art. The VGVN enables gamers to stay updated on policy issues and take action by contacting federal, state, and local officials to express their views. Rest assured the VGVN does not sell or share any information it collects.

VGVN

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RETRO CITY RAMPAGE

XBLA, WiiWARE

A pixelated parody of 1980s video games and culture that's dripping with old-school charm

WORDS BY PATRICK SHAW

Canadian game designer Brian Provinciano grew up binging on animated TV shows like *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and playing pixelated NES classics like *Super Mario Bros.* and *Bionic Commando*. His new video game, *Retro City Rampage*, is an endeavor that's taken seven years to get off the ground—and a celebration of his undying affection for '80s pop culture.

"*Retro City Rampage* is a love letter to my childhood," says Provinciano, who makes up the game's entire full-time development team. He points out that he enlisted some help with the game's 8-bit score (Leonard Paul and Jake "Virt" Kaufman) and cut-scenes (Maxime Trépanier). Everything else, from writing dialogue to writing code, fell on his shoulders.

They Call Him "Player"

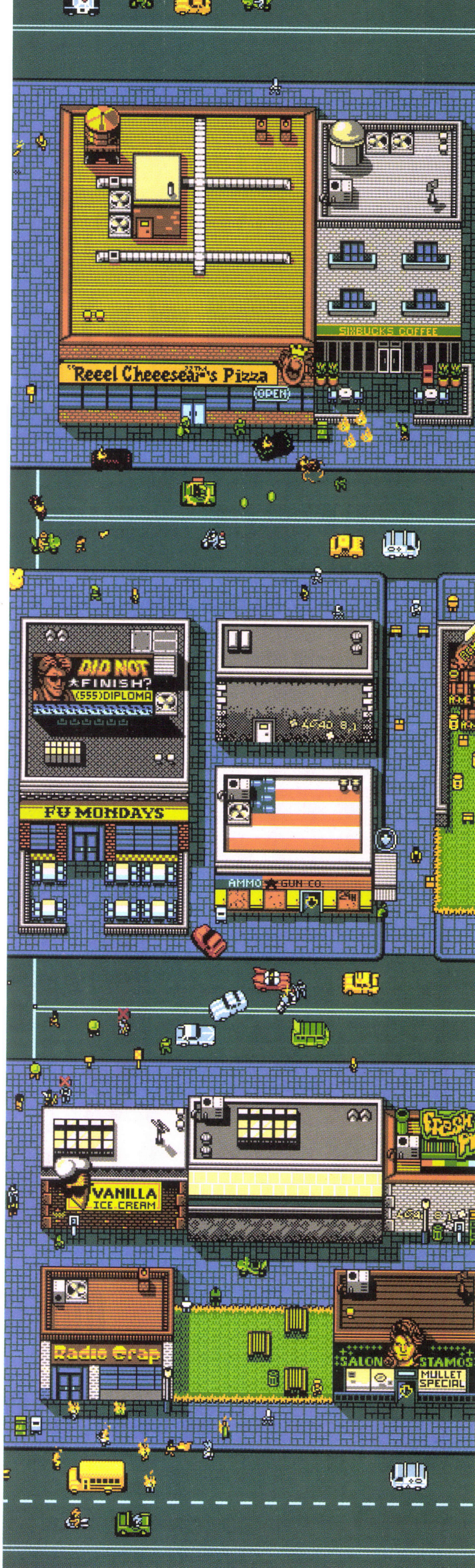
In *Retro City Rampage* you play as a man named "Player." The experience plays out much like *Grand Theft Auto*, only it's powered by vibrant pixelated graphics not unlike the classic game its name parodies: *River City Ransom*. In addition to jacking cars and gunning down other characters, *GTA*-style, you can stomp pedestrians flat like Goombas, get a haircut, drink yourself silly, visit a casino, or jump into a time-travelling Porta-Potty. There's even a bionic arm you can equip to latch on to enemies and objects, an obvious homage to Capcom's *Bionic Commando*.

If you couldn't tell, humor is a big part of *Retro City Rampage*. Provinciano says all the jokes, over-the-top dialogue, and names of things like businesses (such as "Vanilla Ice Cream" and "Gin and Produce") packed into *RCR* are a reflection of what makes him laugh. "That's my sense of humor," he says, adding that he once briefly aspired to become a standup comedian. "Always been a fan of comedy and making people laugh."

I Love the '80s

While *Retro City Rampage*'s visuals may look crusty compared to this generation's near-photorealistic games, there's a certain beauty and charm to the NES era's colorful 8-bit visuals. Provinciano explains why the look of this gaming era strongly resonates with gamers today. "Pixel graphics age well—they're still very easy on the eyes," he says. "3D games, on the other hand, age horribly. Try playing a PlayStation 1 game on your big-screen HDTV. It's about as hard as downing a tablespoon of cinnamon."

Provinciano's tremendously proud of *Retro City Rampage*, which he's poured his heart and soul into. But

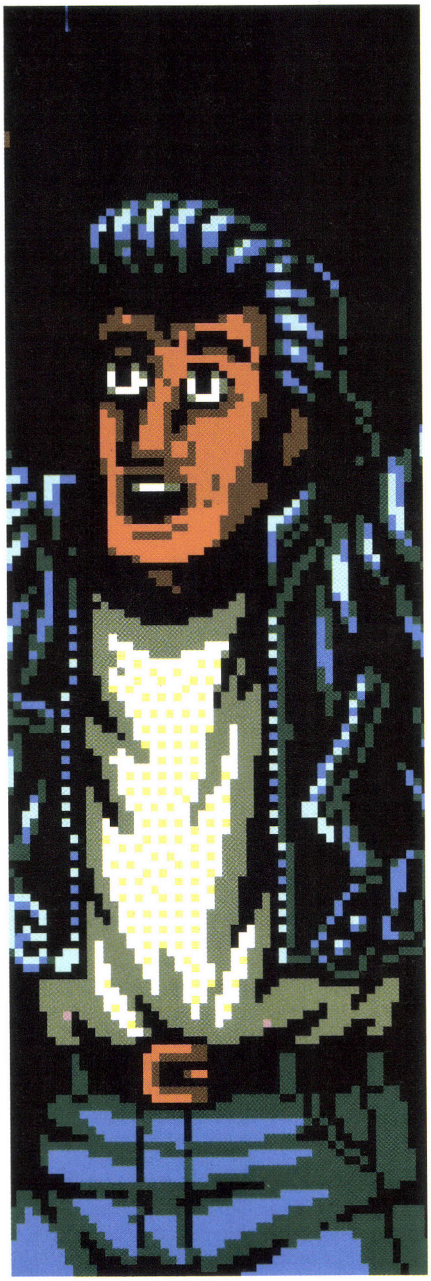


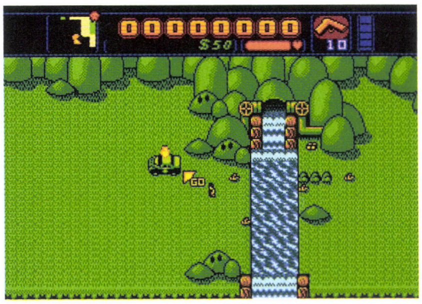
it wasn't easy getting his game made and approved by Nintendo and Microsoft for release on WiiWare and Xbox Live Arcade. He tells us that even after winning multiple design awards for the game, it took over six months, putting his mortgage on the line and cashing in his retirement savings for *Retro City Rampage* to get the green-light and signed.

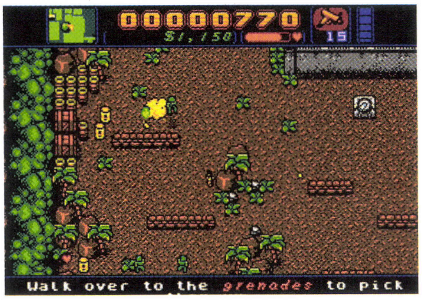
"The contract negotiation experience was *not* a good one," Provinciano says, expressing his frustration. "It took even more unnecessary time away from finishing the game and improving the overall quality, and [this] is something Microsoft needs to work on. They need to look at the big picture and let us do what we do best—make great games. We will both be far better off in the end."

Indie Inspiration

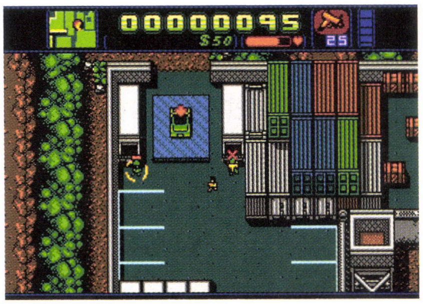
But Provinciano stresses that he sees light at the end of the tunnel. His game is finally getting made, and his studio, Vblank Entertainment, is now licensed for all the major consoles and handhelds, with multiple publishers interested in his ideas for future projects. Looking at the nearly completed *Retro City Rampage*, Provinciano feels deeply connected to the final product. "It's like a book of poetry or a music album," he says. "I'm personally ingrained in every pixel of this thing."

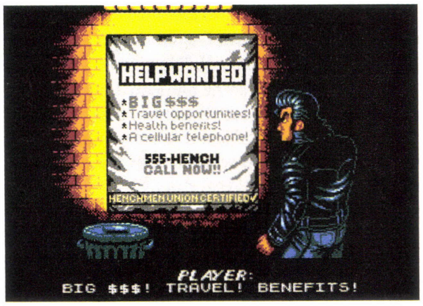






Walk over to the grenades to pick

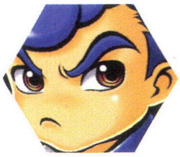




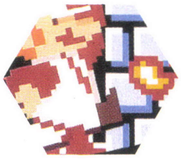
HELP WANTED
*BIG $$$
*Travel opportunities!
*Health benefits!
*A cellular telephone!
555-HENCH
CALL NOW!!
HENCHMEN UNION CERTIFIED

PLAYER:
BIG $$$! TRAVEL! BENEFITS!

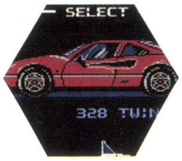
Retro City Rampage's Parodies



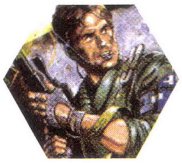
· River City Ransom



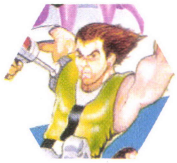
· Super Mario Bros.



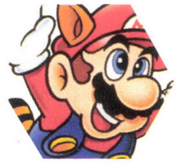
· Rad Racer



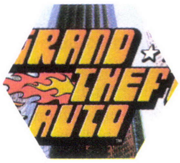
· Metal Gear



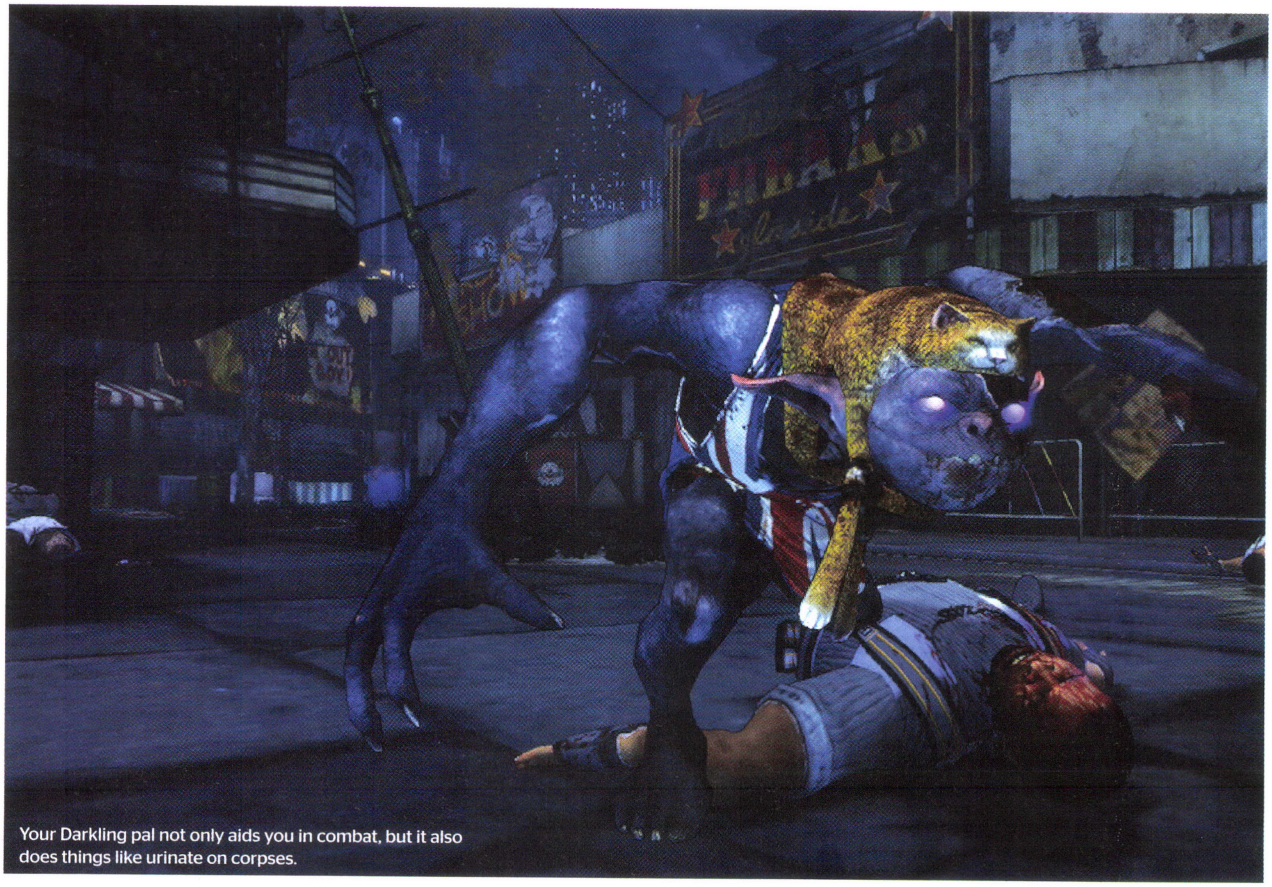
· Bionic Commando



· Super Mario Bros. 3



· Grand Theft Auto


Your Darkling pal not only aids you in combat, but it also does things like urinate on corpses.

THE DARKNESS II

PS3, X360, PC

The heart-ravaging cult hit returns with a new developer and an art style closer to its comic-book roots.

WORDS BY MATT CLARK

Almost four years have passed since we've heard from *The Darkness's* mobster turned antihero, Jackie Estacado. Back in 2007, Starbreeze Studios released the game to critical success, finding an audience in first-person shooter fans looking for something beyond the abundance of alien-zombie killers and military simulators. So when 2K Games announced earlier this year that Digital Extremes (*Homefront* PC version, *BioShock 2* multiplayer) would helm the sequel—completely changing the art direction—fans might have felt a bit nervous.

Back on the Attack

After spending some time with the developers at their London, Ontario-based studio, the good news is *The Darkness II* feels and looks fresh while still maintaining the gory combat that makes the original fun. "The challenge for us was making sure we understood the core of what was so loved about [*The Darkness*]," says Sheldon Carter, the project director for *The Darkness II*. "No matter what we change, we know some hardcore fans are not going to like those elements, so we really had to be thoughtful about what we wanted to change. No matter what, we have to hold on to this core emotional story."

Following the events of the first game, Jackie finds himself alone, his girlfriend, Jennie, killed directly in front of him. The lowly mob hitman has since taken over the Franchetti crime family, but a fanatical group dubbed The Brotherhood would like nothing more than to drain Jackie of his Darkness powers, drop by bullet-ridden drop.

New Enemies, Old Friends

"I'm really big on player choice and creating strategies within games," says *The Darkness II* Lead Designer Tom Galt. "Playing the first game, I could use a black hole, step back in the shadows, let my power recharge, go back, and throw another one...we want you to use the powers you like, but at the same time, we want to make sure we're challenging you, as well."

Galt lead me though HellGate Field, an eerie carnival stage in the game's latter half. The Brotherhood's three classes—Rookie, Melee, and Support—definitely heighten the tactical element, using each other's abilities to take advantage of Jackie's weakness to light. It's infinitely more difficult than the first game, but luckily, you still have your trash-talking darkling to help you along. This time there's only one, but he's there pretty much all the time, and he wears...a cat on his head.

"We use him as a guide," Galt says. "He moves you from objective to objective."

Keeping It Graphic

So, the game has adapted its combat considerably, and it's obviously moving the story forward, but the immediate change you'll notice about *The Darkness II* are the visuals. I asked Carter why Digital Extremes made the decision to move closer toward the game's comic-book beginnings.

"As soon as we started the project, all we were doing was poring through the graphic novels," he says. "We were like, 'Oh, wow, look at these pops of color' and 'Look how this feels; how can a video game do this?' So, that's where we went."

The game's "graphic noir" style doesn't exactly look cel-shaded; it evokes something closer to a higher-detailed *Borderlands.* Each texture is hand-painted and reacts dynamically to light, heightening the sense that you're playing within a comic book. It's incredibly impressive when you're able to actually see cross-hatching move across a building's side, knowing that an artist actually put their personal touch into the game.

We'll have to wait until October to check out the rest of *The Darkness II*, but it looks like Digital Extremes may have just pulled off a highly stylized, gore-filled shooter that actually manages to surpass its predecessor. Maybe.

A Heaping Dose of Gore

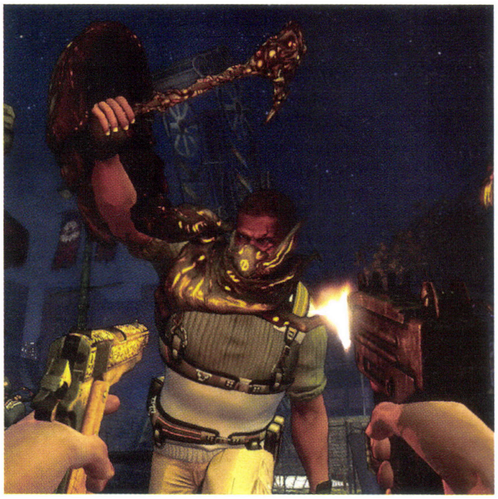
Here's just four (that we know of so far) rather creative ways to use those handy-dandy demon arms for maximum blood-splattering executions.

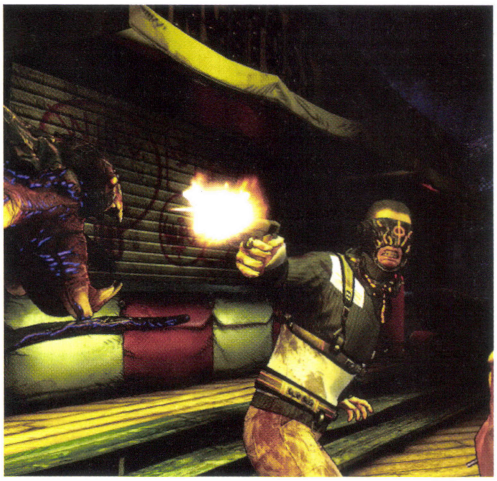
1. The **Daisy Pop** is your standard decapitation. Well, if standard involves being nearly suffocated by giant, evil tentacles and your head popping off.

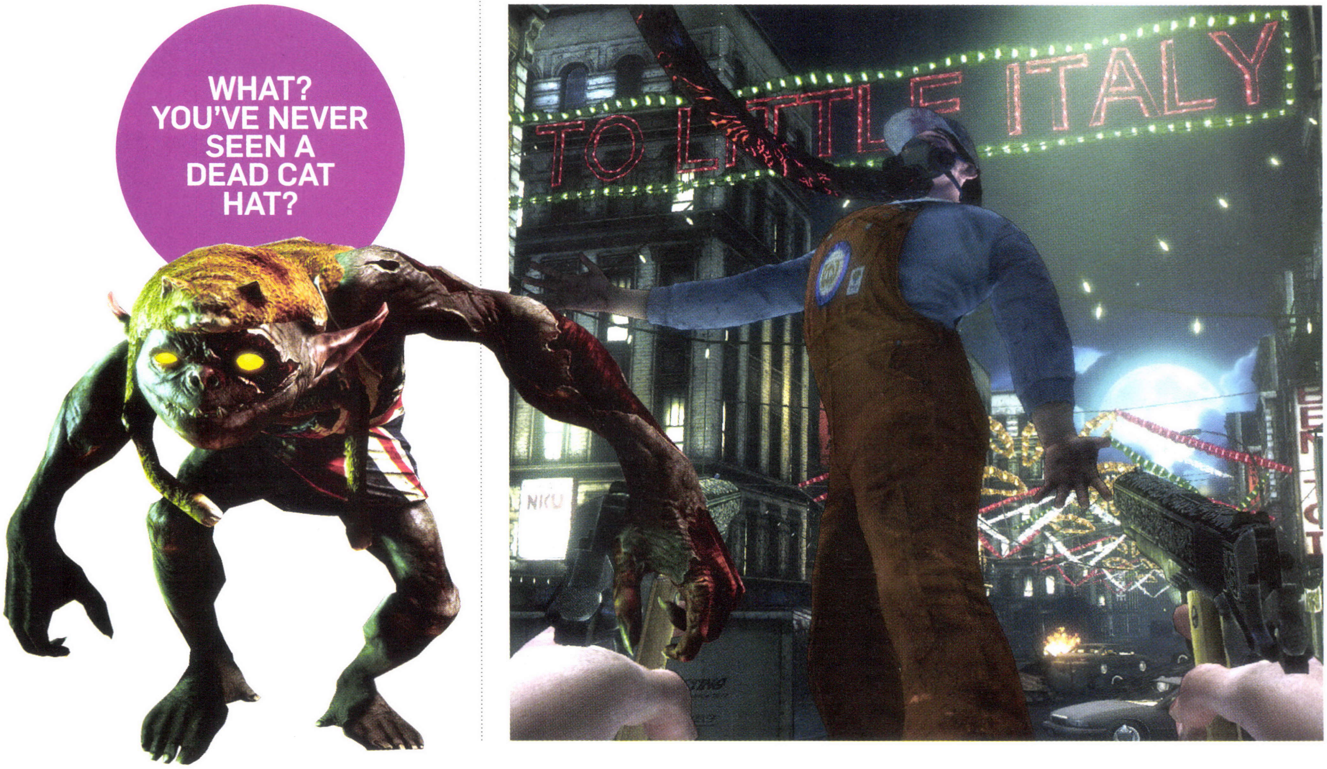
2. Judging by the **Spinal Tap** execution, the Darkness may have inhabited Sub-Zero at one point in history. Added bonus: You can hurl the ripped-out backbone at other enemies.

3. The **Anaconda** entails using your demon arms just like a giant snake, constricting your prey. Except at the end, the snake rips though the prey's chest and eats his heart in front of him.

4. Still can't make up your mind on an execution? Split the difference with the **Wish Bone**. Grab each leg of the unfortunate fellow, hang him upside down, and—well, let's just say he'll be half the man he used to be.







WHAT? YOU'VE NEVER SEEN A DEAD CAT HAT?

Armless, nameless, and (mostly) faceless, *Journey*'s protagonist is as mysterious as the world it exists in.

JOURNEY

PLAYSTATION 3

Iconoclastic developer Jenova Chen takes us on a journey through his wondrous wasteland.

WORDS BY PATRICK SHAW

As my nameless robed avatar, I cross a fragmented bridge mysteriously located in the middle of a sprawling desert. At the far end of the bridge, I approach a series of dunes arranged in a manner that makes them look like wind-blown steps of sand, calling me toward the towering mountain in the distance. After scaling a large sand hill to get a better view of the mountain, I slide down the other side of it, and my time with *Journey* ends.

"How do you feel?" asks Creative Director Jenova Chen as the screen fades to black. It's an unusual thing for a developer to ask after a video-game demo, but *Journey* itself is quite an unusual experience. It's impossible to die or inflict harm; communicating with other players online involves no voice chatting or gamertags; the game is devoid of a narrative or any explanation as to what you're even doing in the world.

Emotional Impact

I struggle to find a word that sufficiently describes what I just played, but "lost" comes to mind. I grew up intentionally driving over helpless pedestrians in *Carmageddon* and shooting people in the face in *Doom*, so a game where you can't kill people in multiplayer is a bit foreign to me. But the beauty of *Journey* is not entirely lost on me. It's a mesmerizingly surreal experience, and I think people might even look at games a bit differently once they embark on their own journey in the sandy wastes.

"When you play a first-person shooter online, there's no real emotional communication between you and your teammates," Chen says, who explains that he cofounded Thatgamecompany with Kellee Santiago with one simple goal in mind: Expand what video games can communicate on the emotional spectrum.

"If you look at more established entertainment forms like music, film, or novels, they have a wide variety of genres that each give you a particular feeling," Chen says. "I don't know if there's a video game that does that. Most games either make you feel accomplished, excited, or frightened, in the case of horror games. There's no romance or documentary. A lot is missing."

An Online Experience Unlike All Else

An online interaction between two players in *Journey* can happen anytime, anywhere. But instead of exchanging items or attacks, the game forces players to find new ways to communicate, work together, solve puzzles, and even form an emotional connection between themselves and a stranger on the Internet. "They may not necessarily know anything about each other, but they know they're human beings," Chen says. "There's an interaction that happens, and when it's right, it feels like I can understand that person without the use of language or voice. It's often very magical. I often joke that *Journey* is probably the most social game in the console space because it focuses on people connecting—yet there is no chat. It's all through movement and activity in the game."

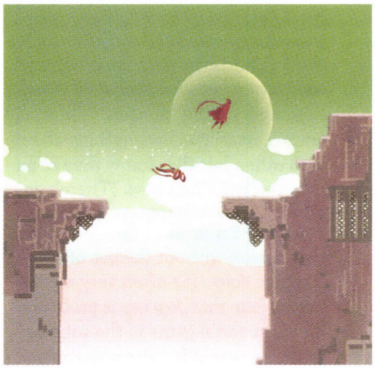
Do What, Now?

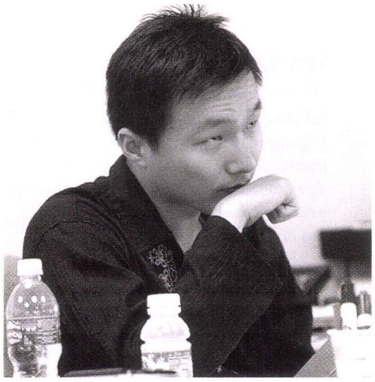
Journey's desolate desert landscapes are stunning to behold, but what if gamers don't immediately get its point? *Journey*'s spirit goes back to the ongoing debate of video games as art. Chen believes the reason people are still debating this is because art itself is not a well-defined thing. "People are still debating whether architecture and commercial art is art," he points out. "If they haven't figured that out yet, how can we talk about video games?"

But Chen does consider his games (including *Flower* and *Flow*) art. "My definition of art is that it's a communication between an author and the audience through a particular medium. It could be anything," he says. "If I look at Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*, and all I see is the urinal, then I miss the point. Look at the *Mona Lisa*. What is that? An ugly woman with a creepy smile, and it's expensive because it's superold and done by this famous guy. There is no artistic value in it to me. Art is relative to the viewer."

And while some may not get what Chen's and Thatgamecompany's artistic intent is with *Journey* immediately, he promises that it all makes sense to the player once they complete the game and the pieces of the puzzle finally come together. He points to a quote by philosopher Saint Augustine—which he spotted scrawled in a subway station—to summarize the purpose of the player's journey in the game: "People travel to wonder at the height of mountains, at the huge waves of the sea, at the long courses of rivers, at the vast compass of the ocean, at the circular motion of the stars, and they pass themselves by without wondering."

Chen adds his own wisdom: "In a modern city we all walk by one another—we all have our phones in our hands, and we ignore how amazing each individual is—particularly in the online world, where there are all these people playing from all around the world."

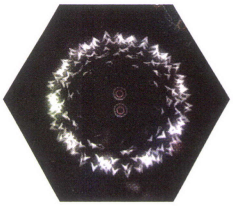




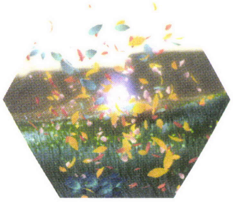
An Artist's Touch

Jenova Chen reflects on his previous works.

Cloud (2005)
"It's about the feeling of youthfulness, of your memory, and the feeling of imagination which we all enjoyed in our life."



Flow (2006)
"With *Flow* we picked the opposite of what the conventional console game is about, which is excitement and thrill. We tried to see if we could produce a game that can make you feel tranquil, at peace, meditative, but still engaged."

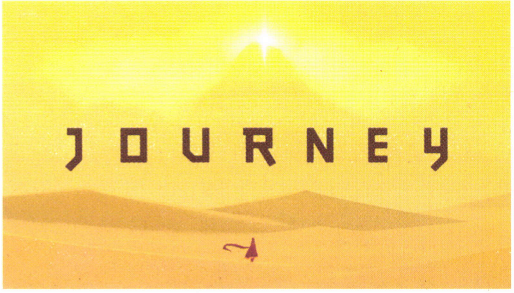


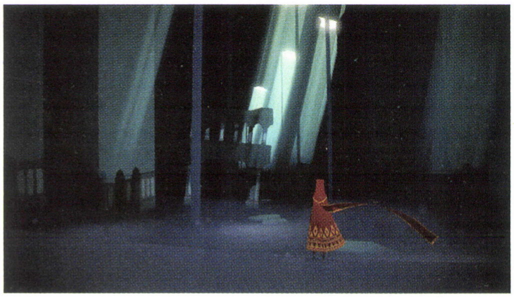
Flower (2009)
"*Flower* is more relevant now because it's about people thinking about nature versus urban life."

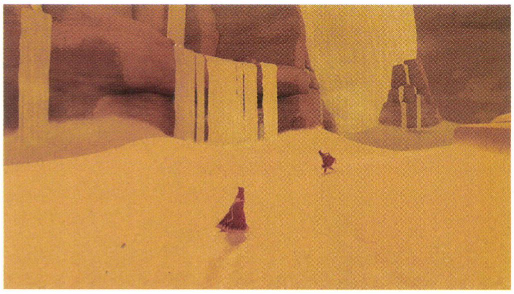
USC
UNIVERSITY
OF SOUTHERN
CALIFORNIA

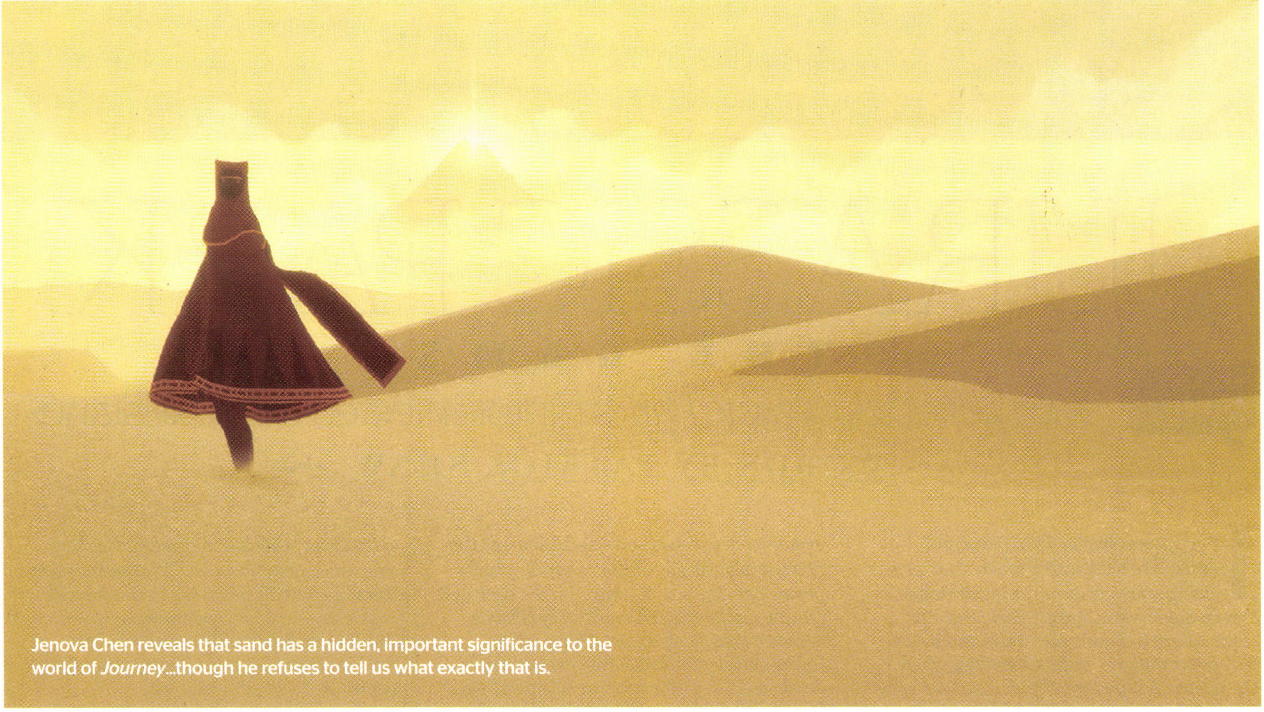
Did You Know?

Jenova Chen's first game, *Cloud*, was created by just seven students at the University of Southern California.

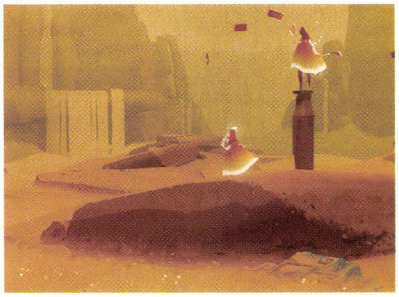








Jenova Chen reveals that sand has a hidden, important significance to the world of *Journey*...though he refuses to tell us what exactly that is.



Jurassic Park is the first Telltale title where players can die. How scary is a T-rex if it can't eat your head off in one bite?

JURASSIC PARK: THE GAME

PS3, X360, PC, MAC

Your ticket to *Jurassic Park*'s raptor-infested tropical island.

WORDS BY PATRICK SHAW

If you were alive in 1993—and old enough to walk into a movie theater—chances are you saw the beginning of Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park*. Not the scene where the dude gets devoured by a dinosaur at night—right after that, when Dr. Grant and the rest of the helicopter crew fly over the dinosaur-inhabited tropical island for the first time and John Williams' booming orchestral score kicks in. It's one of those magical movie moments you don't easily forget, one that strikes the same emotional tones Telltale Games is riffing on with their adventure title, *Jurassic Park: The Game*.

"Welcome...to Jurassic Park"

In *Jurassic Park: The Game*, players learn what happens after the original film, when everyone flees the island (Isla Nublar) as the dinosaurs break free. But the game actually begins before that. "It begins on the dark and stormy night when Dennis Nedry [Wayne Knight's character] steals a Barbasol can full of dinosaur embryos and dies a terrible death and the park begins to fall apart," says Designer Joe Pinney. "Remember how all nonessential personnel were supposed to get off the island? Well, not everyone made it." The dinosaurs, he adds, have also gained access to virtually every part of the island.

The game tells the stories of those left behind during the escape, as well as other characters attempting to infiltrate Isla Nublar. Aside from *Jurassic Park: The Game*'s lead protagonist, Chief Veterinarian Gerry Harding, who had a bit part in the movie, the game features an entirely new cast. Pinney stresses, however, that the new characters aren't just some bland stand-ins for the movie's memorable cast. "We wanted characters who felt like good fits in the *Jurassic Park* universe—and had real reasons to be there," he says, adding that this was important in making sure they had a strong story that continues beyond the movie.

Re-creating the Park

When it comes to rebuilding Isla Nublar, the team's doing its utmost to ensure their version of the island is as accurate as possible. Everything from the treacherous jungle to the Jurassic Park Visitor Center has been faithfully re-created in *Jurassic Park: The Game*. They've even reconstructed iconic areas of the island, like the hill where Dennis Dedry dies. The team took in multiple viewings of Steven Spielberg's original *Jurassic Park* film—and many screen captures for points of reference—to "nail" everything fans expect while also covering their own gameplay needs. Executive Producer Kevin Boyle reveals they even "scrutinized reference materials outside the first film to make sure the story we're telling is consistent with the broader *Jurassic Park* canon."

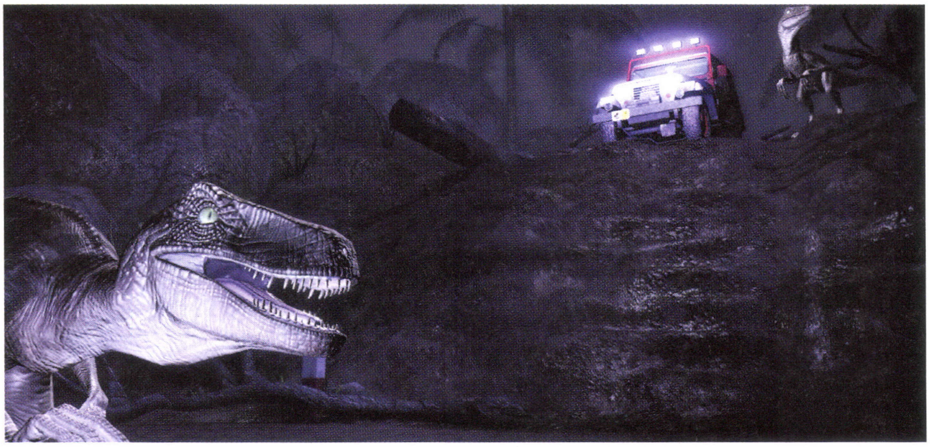
Telltale's made a tremendous effort to authentically rebuild every important site (such as the park's massive torch-adorned gate and that big tree/hiding spot) on Isla Nublar, but a lot of what you see won't be familiar. "The movie featured only a small sample of the entire Park but hinted at so much more," Pinney explains. "This was an opportunity for us to explore the rest of the park and design locations that would make sense to support the Jurassic Park dream, like laboratories, holding pens, power stations and park rides."

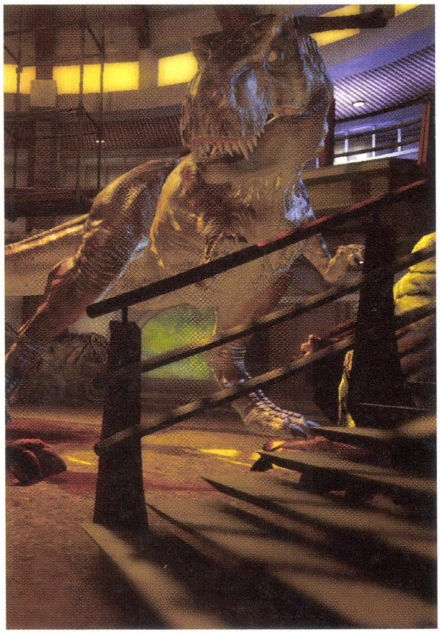
In order to create these new facilities and sites, Pinney says they based the blueprints on the architecture of existing locations from the film. Jurassic Park is not only a scientific facility where dinosaurs are grown but also an amusement park for visitors. "It was a lot of fun imagining what they would have built, and how they would have, for both of these purposes." In addition to new manmade structures, they also wanted to capture the island's natural beauty. "Even with all the action and danger, it's a beautiful tropical island, after all."

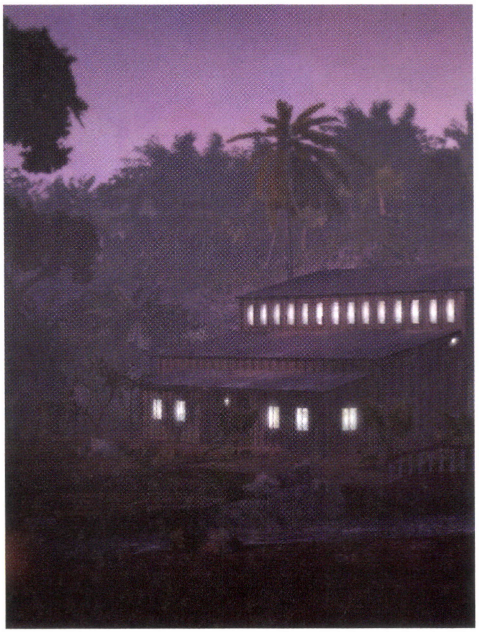
No Longer Extinct

Exploration is a big part of the experience, but danger, suspense, and death is also rampant on the island. "Jurassic Park is, in part, about incredibly perilous encounters with dinosaurs, too," Boyle says. "When it first released, *Jurassic Park* made an incredibly strong impression on anyone who was paying attention, and starting from our most clear and iconic recollections of *Jurassic Park* seems like a natural place to begin with *Jurassic Park: The Game*."

Whether or not Telltale can effectively re-create the magic of Spielberg's groundbreaking sci-fi film—while adding their own spin on the series—remains to be seen. So far, revisiting Jurassic Park looks like it's going to be worth the price of admission.

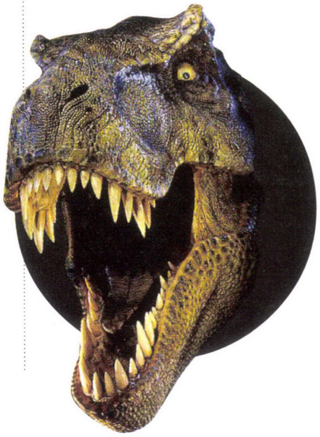






Chris Parisi's uh..."Take" on Dinosaurs:

I'm all for any excuse to incorporate dinosaurs in real-life. Sometimes I see this old lady around town with thick Coke bottle glasses and a bird's nest hairdo, wearing an old orange dress that looks like she stole it from a Russian corpse. Whenever I see her, she glares at me, and when she turns around, you can see the bones of her spine literally poking out of her back, which looks like the back of a Stegosaurus. She kind of moves the same way, too, waddling from side-to-side as she looks for food. Anyhoo, the new *Jurassic Park* game looks like a less creepy way to satisfy my love of dinosaurs.



DON
FORGOTTEN
ALONE
NO TURNING
HE HAS TO PAY
DREAMING ABOU

PLAYSTATION 3, XBOX 360

SILENT HILL:
DOWNPOUR

INTERVIEW BY PATRICK SHAW

NOT ANOTHER LAME SEQUEL: *SILENT HILL: DOWNPOUR*

8 Reasons Why *Silent Hill 8* Won't Suck.

I. Murphy Didn't Choose to Come to Silent Hill

"In every other game in the series, the protagonist *chooses* to go to Silent Hill. Whether they're searching for a daughter, a dead wife, or taking a shortcut to cut down on travel time, it was always a conscious choice that landed them in creepytown, USA. *Silent Hill: Downpour*'s Murphy Pendleton had no such choice [Pendleton is a prisoner whose transport crashes near Silent Hill, leaving him stranded]. What significance this has is up for the player to discover as they help Murphy find a way out."—*Silent Hill* team

II. Sidequests

"While the older games had a town to explore between 'areas,' that feature was dropped eight years ago and hasn't seen a return. We've brought that back, with an even bigger city and more potential interaction with it. We've littered sidequests throughout the town for the player to uncover. These may not tie directly into the main narrative, but they will provide smaller stories and expand the history of *Silent Hill*."

III. No Weapon Inventory

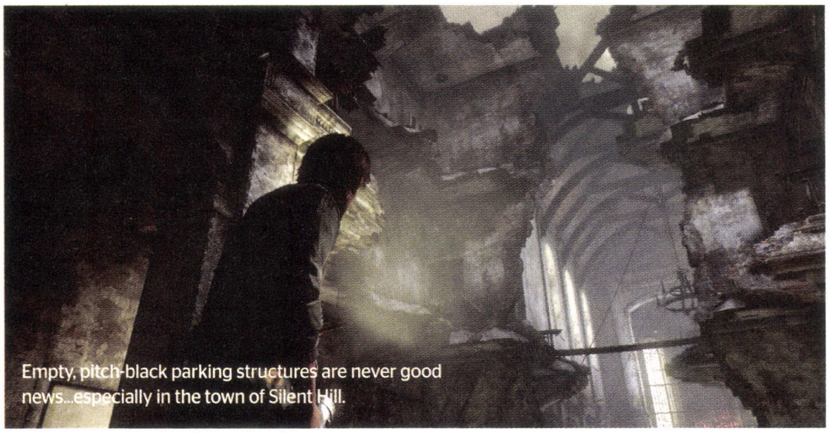
"A staple of the survival-horror genre is having limited resources with which to combat frightening creatures. But by the end of most games, you've amassed a small arsenal of pipes, crowbars, shotguns, and rocket launchers. So while it might start out scary to be conserving ammo, by the end you aren't in much danger. Murphy isn't so lucky—he can only fight with as much as he can carry in his hands. If he finds a better weapon, it means abandoning the one he's currently using. And if that weapon should break, it's a frantic dash to find another nearby before the monsters close in."

IV. Dan Licht

"*Shattered Memories* was the [final *SH*] with music composed by long-time series maestro Akira Yamaoka. Stepping up to fill his shoes for *Downpour* is Daniel Licht, probably best known for his role composing music for Showtime's acclaimed original series, *Dexter*. While Licht is staying true to the feel of *Silent Hill*, he's also expanding it, adding additional depth to this legendary soundscape."

V. Comic Collaboration

"*Silent Hill* is also a long-running graphic-novel series from publisher IDW. However, many of the old stories there are considered 'what ifs' and side stories to the game canon. With *Downpour*, however, the two worlds have joined and opened a world of possibilities for future tie-ins, where the graphic novel stories will directly expand the game universe. *Downpour*'s story was written by Tom Waltz, also the author of the recent *Silent Hill: Past Life* graphic novel—both of which share a significant character."



Empty, pitch-black parking structures are never good news...especially in the town of Silent Hill.

VI. Unpredictable Otherworlds

"One key element that separates *Silent Hill* from the other horror games is its twisted Otherworld. While this has been present in all the games, it's also become somewhat predictable—simply a 'weird version' of an area the player has already traversed. In *Downpour*, the Otherworlds have been designed as their own separate hellscapes. So don't expect simple retreads or 'backtracking with a twist'—anything can happen in *Downpour*'s Nightmares, with new twists emerging at every moment."

VII. Puzzle Difficulty Returns

"A much beloved feature of *Silent Hills 2* and *3* was the 'puzzle difficulty' selection. Unfortunately, this setting vanished in the rest of the games. Knowing how much fans liked being able to toggle the mind-benders independently of the combat challenge, we brought it back."

VIII. No Nurses, No Pyramid Head

"It's easy for a long-running series to degenerate into a series of fanservice moments that reference past glories. However, nothing kills horror faster than knowing what to expect. Since *Silent Hill* reflects each individual's inner turmoil, it doesn't make sense for everyone to see the same monstrous visions. *Downpour* isn't a game we want to *look* like *Silent Hill*, by throwing in popular enemies, a rusty otherworld, and calling it a day. This is a 100 percent authentic *Silent Hill* experience from the ground up—new characters, new story, new creatures, new twists, and a new Otherworld."

CELEBRATING 75 YEARS
THE MIAMI STAR
LATE CITY FINAL
MIAMI KILLE

Dexterous Composition

Silent Hill: Downpour's score is crafted by Dan Licht, the award-winning composer behind the music of Showtime's *Dexter* series. His philosophy is that a soundtrack should complement the visual aspect of an experience rather than overpower it. "If you're noticing the score, then maybe the score's not doing the right job," he says. "It's really about the emotional undertone of a scene. It's for amplifying what's going on screen."

YEAR
1608
-SOUL CALIBUR-

PREVIEWS

SOUL CALIBUR V

PLAYSTATION 3,
XBOX 360

5
SOUL CALIBUR

WORDS BY CHRIS HOLT

THE
WEAPONS-BASED
BRAWLER RETURNS
AFTER A LONG WAIT
WITH FRESH FACES
AND A SOUL THAT
STILL BURNS.

TRAN ENDING
HI RY
AN RLD
A T ULS
AN DS
ETE LY
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WHEN A
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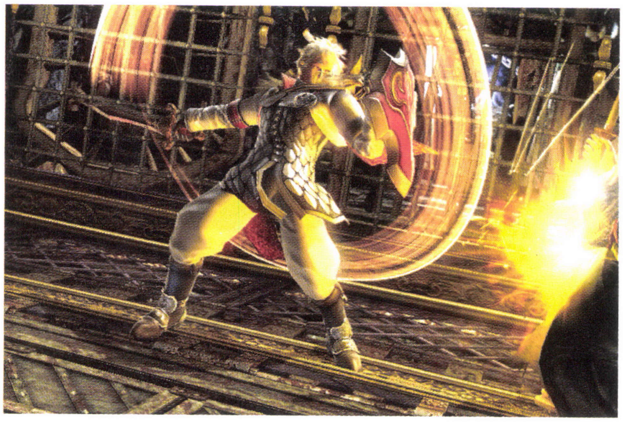
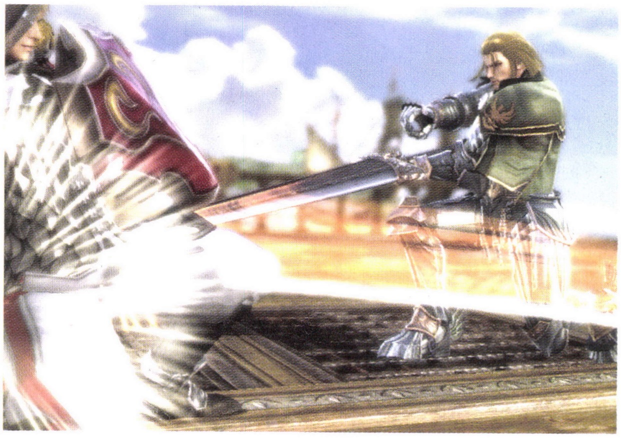
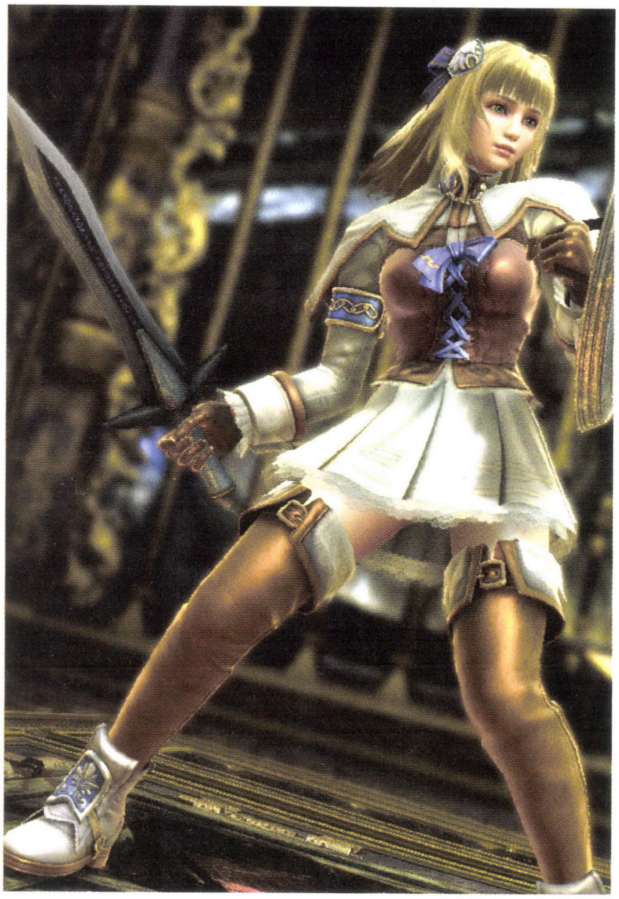
A HERO







When you talk about the *Soul* fighting series, you'll sometimes hear its accompanying tagline: "A tale of swords and souls, eternally retold." But lately, that phrase is met with derisive laughter, as the famed weapon-based fighting series has offered increasingly redundant installments with little innovation. So when *Soulcalibur V* was announced in May, it was clear that Namco Bandai had to change the formula of its iconic fighting franchise.

A New Stage of History

Soulcalibur V takes place 17 years after the events of *Soulcalibur IV* and—perhaps as a nod to its critics—has been promoted as a "true sequel" in the series by Producer Hisharu Tago. The teaser trailer reveals a new fighter who has come upon the scene, the young Grecian warrior Patroclus. First mentioned in the earlier *Soul* games, Patroclus is the son of series regular Sophitia Alexandra and the nephew of Cassandra Alexandra. Classics majors might recognize his name, as it appears in Homer's epic poem, *The Iliad*. In Grecian mythology, Patroclus is the son of Menoetius and a beloved comrade of Achilles. But his name is intriguing, as it means "glory to the father," who in the *Soul* series is supposedly Sophitia's husband, Rothian.

In the trailer, Patroclus bears a similar sword-and-shield setup that his mother and aunt use, indicating he employs a similar fighting style—likely incorporating some of Sophitia's signature moves with Cassandra's superior strength. Patroclus could represent the retiring of the two Grecian women, or it could simply indicate a switch in the story's narrative. While the first games of the series (*Soul Edge* and *Soulcalibur*) focus on Sophitia's and Taki's quest against the evil blades, the later games in the series focus more on cherubic Xianghua, monkish Kilik, and the vampiric Raphael. We anticipate another shift in narrative focus with the arrival of *Soulcalibur V*.

Familiar Faces

While players can look forward to learning Patroclus' story in *Soulcalibur V*, they'll also get to see how many of the series favorites have aged. The events in *Soul Edge* take place in the year 1584. *Soulcalibur III* takes place in 1591, with *Soulcalibur IV* set shortly thereafter. Meanwhile, *Soulcalibur V* is set a whopping 17 years in the future, around 1608. Screens confirm that the mercenary samurai Mitsurugi is in the game, and the trailer reveals the return of series protagonist, the fallen knight Siegfried, now nearly middle-aged. But by 1608, series regulars such as Voldo, Seong Mi-na, Sophitia, and Taki will have aged roughly 24 years since the events of *Soul Edge*. Seeing them all return is unlikely. Just as Korean swordsman Hwang was traded out for Yun-Seong after the events of *Soulcalibur*, we should expect to see some famous fighters replaced by similarly armed successors.

Old Weapons, New Wielders?

Since Patroclus is the son of Sophitia, we might see the sons and daughters of other characters playing important roles in *Soulcalibur V*. Axe-wielding wild man Rock may finally step aside for his protégé, Bangoo. And we might see more of Amy, Raphael's charge, too. Then again, since both Amy and Raphael have been cursed by vampirism, perhaps the jump in time won't affect them.

Perhaps the romantic entanglements of Kilik and Xianghua have consequences in *Soulcalibur V*, and the tension between Seung Min-na and Hwang may have developed further since the last game. There's also the possibility that Ivy, Taki, Maxi, and many others have children or successors waiting in the wings.

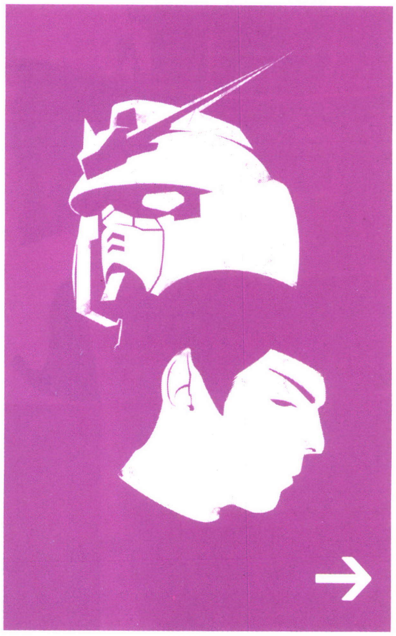
CUT YOUR PATH TO AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

YEAR
1608
-SOUL CALIBUR-

WHEN A MAN BECOMES A HERO

Crossover Characters We Want in *Soulcalibur V*

In the tradition of *Tekken*'s Hiehachi appearing in *Soulcalibur II* and several *Star Wars* characters appearing in *Soulcalibur IV*, Namco Bandai has confirmed that there will be cross-over characters from other franchises in *Soulcalibur V*. Here's who we'd like to see on the roster.



Style Over Smash

Everything we've seen so far indicates that *Soulcalibur V* will continue the series' move towards a darker, grittier look. And with a renewed focus on combos and smaller-damage attacks, we could see the end of huge health-draining swings and the slower, defensive-oriented combat embodied by characters like Nightmare and Astaroth. Still, a more fluid combat may endear the game to new fans after the series has lost ground to rivals like *Street Fighter*, *Tekken*, and *Virtua Fighter*.

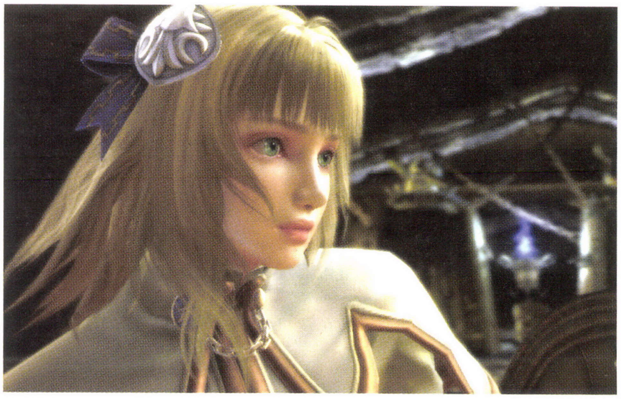
Whether or not *Soulcalibur V* will be a welcome return to form for the series or as unwelcome experiment, players have to give developer Namco Bandai credit for taking their flagship franchise into uncharted waters. When so many fighting games are being rebooted or seeing their narratives retold, *Soulcalibur*'s story is marching on. Welcome back to the stage in history.

Crossover Characters We Want

- **Ryu Hayabusa, Lei Fang, & Bass** *(Dead or Alive/Ninja Gaiden)*
- **Turok, Dinosaur Hunter** *(Turok)*
- **Batman** *(Arkham Asylum)*
- **Samanosuke Akechi** *(Onimusha)*
- **Akira Yuki & Jeffry McWild** *(Virtua Fighter)*
- **Xena: Warrior Princess** *(Xena: Warrior Princess)*
- **Nariko** *(Heavenly Sword)*
- **RX-78 Gundam** *(Mobile Suit Gundam)*
- **Ash** *(Evil Dead series)*

Crossover Characters We Don't Want

- **Captain Kirk & Mr. Spock** *(Star Trek)*
- **Duke Nukem** *(Duke Nukem Forever)*
- **Professor Layton** *(Professor Layton)*
- **Freddy Kruger & Jason Voorhees** *(Nightmare on Elm Street, Friday the 13th)*
- **Optimus Prime** *(Transformers)*
- **Glacius, Sabrewulf & B. Orchid** *(Killer Instinct)*
- **Wander** *(Shadow of the Colossus)*



Soulcalibur's Chronology

1584: The events of *Soul Edge* take place.

- Sophitia and Taki defeat Cervantes, the evil pirate, and destroy one of the dual Soul Edge blades.
- Siegfried takes possession of the remaining blade and unleashes an evil seed throughout the world.

1587: Soulcalibur

- Kilik, Xianghua, and Maxi prevent Siegfried/Nightmare from restoring Soul Edge to its former strength. Xianghua's sword, the Krita-Yuga, is revealed to be Soul Calibur.

1591: Soulcalibur II and III

- Though Soul Edge was defeated, Siegfried still transforms into the evil knight, Nightmare, and continues to rampage around the countryside. The French swordsman Raphael attacks Nightmare, and by doing so, distracts the spirit of the sword enough for Siegfried to assert his will. Raphael pierces the sword's eye.
- Raphael becomes corrupted by the sword, and when Siegfried tries to destroy Soul Edge with Soulcalibur, the two swords embrace and become one.
- Though Soul Edge had been temporarily defeated, Zasalamel harvests the evil swords of Ostrheinsburg Castle to create a new body for Nightmare.

1591-1592: Soul Calibur IV

- Zasalamel breaks the embrace of the two swords, and Nightmare picks up Soul Edge while Siegfried takes Soulcalibur. A huge explosion destroys the Ostrheinsburg as the two blades meet.
- Algol, the "Hero King," is resurrected by the meeting of the two blades.

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SWORD

SOUL CALIBUR V NAMCO BANDAI PRESENTS

WANNA

MAN BECOMES

5

SOUL CALIBUR
NAMCO BANDAI

The Psychology of BLEEDING YOU DRY

Jamie Madigan reveals five psychological quirks that influence how we buy games.

MENTAL ACCOUNTS & MS POINTS

Anyone who has ever bought something from Xbox Live is probably familiar with this first phenomenon. You can't just put $15 on your credit card to buy a XBLA game; purchases are done in some kind of magical moon money called "Microsoft Points." And if there's a new 1,200 point game that you want, you can't just buy 1,200 points; the closest you can get is 1,600. In the end you have the game, but you also have 400 points left over. "Microsoft is playing the old 10 hot dogs vs. 8 buns trick with the points," says William Poundstone, who writes about the psychology of spending in his book, *Priceless: The Myth of Fair Value*. "The 800/1,600 point denominations are designed to create leftovers, given typical game costs." But do you think this will affect your future purchases?

It probably will, according to research on purchasing behavior in similar situations. When you bought those 1,600 points, you created what's called a "mental account," which is like an account you'd find in any other budget—except that as a *mental* account, its use is susceptible to biases in decision-making. "It's like when people win money gambling in Las Vegas," notes Dan Ariely, a professor of psychology and behavioral economics at Duke University and author of books on decision-making like *Predictably Irrational* and *The Upside of Irrationality*. "They put the money or the points into a mental account." Spending those leftover points on something from the avatar marketplace that you'd never fork over fresh funds is similar to splurging on an expensive dinner after winning at the blackjack table. In both cases the money has been relegated to mental accounts that aren't subject to completely rational decision-making.

This is because the feeling of lost potential from that $20 happened all at once when you bought the 1,600 points, and you're not going to experience much more pain from spending the leftovers. If we want to buy a second game, our mental accounting leads us to think that it's only costing us 800 once we subtract the 400 we already have. But really, it still costs 1,200 points; we're just happily taking the first 400 from a different mental account.

SUNK COSTS & PREORDERS

Let's say your friend Albert preorders a game from his favorite retailer, plunking down $5 to guarantee a copy on release day. When the game comes out, Albert is a little less enthusiastic because early reviews have savaged the game. But he still spends another $55 on a game he really doesn't want because he's doesn't want to lose the $5 he's already spent. Why?

The answer is a phenomenon called "sunk costs." This is when

Illustration by Andrew Yang

THE STATUS QUO EFFECT IS EVERYWHERE

HERE ARE SOME OTHER EXAMPLES OF THE STATUS QUO EFFECT AT WORK IN YOUR WORLD:

→ Signup pages for subscription services like **Netflix** or **GameFly** often default to the most profitable option.

→ Signup pages for **MMOs** often default to something like "Three Months" instead of "Monthly."

→ Selections for "Do you want to receive **marketing e-mail**?" often default to "Yes."

→ Playing whatever game you have in your **disk drive** instead of something else.

→ Free trials rolling into paid **subscriptions** unless you actively cancel.

→ Introductory **cable** or **phone** rates that go up after six months.

→ **Social networking** connectivity in games turned on by default.

→ Forms letting you accept **user agreements** usually default to unchecked to make it appear you're actively and willingly accepting something by checking it.

not losing money you've already sunk into a losing proposition (like a nonrefundable, non-transferable preorder deposit) becomes the main justification for throwing new money in. "That was our money, and we *hate* losing money," points out Ariely. So when faced with walking away from a preorder deposit, most of us would say, "No way! I've put $5 toward that game, and I don't want to just lose it!" But that's irrational if playing that game has little value to you, and it's even worse when we could put remaining funds toward something else that actually does, like another game that isn't terrible or some rocks to bang together.

Sure, retailers sometimes let you switch preorder payments to other purchases, but people may still be fixated on the source of the otherwise sunk cost. "It also speaks to the quality of our decision," Ariely continues. "We don't like to think that we were wrong. We like consistency between our initial judgments and our actions." So we're likely to feel compelled to buy the game just for that reason.

STATUS QUO IN THE MMO

Ever been surprised to look up one day and realize that you haven't logged into a MMO in months, yet you've continued to pay a monthly subscription fee without using the service? If so, you've encountered what's known as the status quo bias.

Consider a 2001 study by two economists who tweaked the signup form for a savings plan for half of a company's new hires. Unless these employees changed a default selection on some paperwork, they were automatically enrolled into a savings plan that deducted money from their paycheck. The other employees were by default automatically *not* enrolled in the program. The results were that 86 percent of employees in the "signed up by default" group participated in the savings plan, compared to 49 percent in the other group. Why? Because when presented options, most people go with the default choice.

It's an easily replicable phenomenon, and what it comes down to is that we often take the path of least resistance, and going with the status quo requires the least amount of thought or effort. This is especially true with complex decisions or those that have to be made based on incomplete information. "Canceling requires doing something; keeping a subscription does not," says health psychologist Kelly McGonigal, author of the upcoming book *The Willpower Instinct*. "The barrier of this 'doing something'—even though it is small—is enough to keep us from acting, or [it] makes us put it off for later."

But McGonigal also points out that irrational optimism plays an active role: "We keep our subscriptions because we believe we will make use of them in the future, despite our pathetic track record. Canceling requires admitting we failed." Marketing researchers have shown that people consistently overestimate how much they'll use a product, and when faced with data to the contrary, they overestimate upcoming usage even *more* as they make unlikely plans to make up for lost time.

FLAT RATE BIASES IN MMO SUBSCRIPTIONS

Let's stick with MMO subscriptions for a moment. Why do you think they typically charge flat rates for 30 days of unlimited play time instead of putting us on a meter and charging by the minute? The reason is what's known as the "flat rate bias," and it's just what it sounds like: Some cultural differences aside, we'd rather have one comparatively large expense up front than suffer many smaller expenses, even if the micropayments ultimately work out in our favor.

This is because the displeasure we feel from a loss eventually flattens out as it grows. All else equal, researchers have found that the difference between spending $100 and $105 feels like less than the difference between spending $5 and $10. As a result, we prefer to pay monthly rather than hourly costs. The smaller, more frequent expenses add up and feel like death to our wallet from a thousand cuts, while we can grit our teeth and better bear one up-front payment that lets us play as much as we want. And if you're thinking that flat rates let us more easily allocate money to those mental accounts discussed earlier, give yourself bonus points for tying it all together!

MCKINLEY'S TAKE

Spending money on video games shouldn't be hard, but it seems like every company nowadays wants you to buy fake money with real money. And that's just stupid. If I buy your game, I want all the stuff that comes with it. Instead of buying virtual gold to buy a virtual horse for my virtual farm, why don't I just light that $5 on fire and flush it down the toilet? I'm not an idiot. If I buy something with money that doesn't physically exist, did I ever really buy anything at all? Tell me I didn't just blow your mind.

5

CUSTOMER LOYALTY & ENDOWED PROGRESS

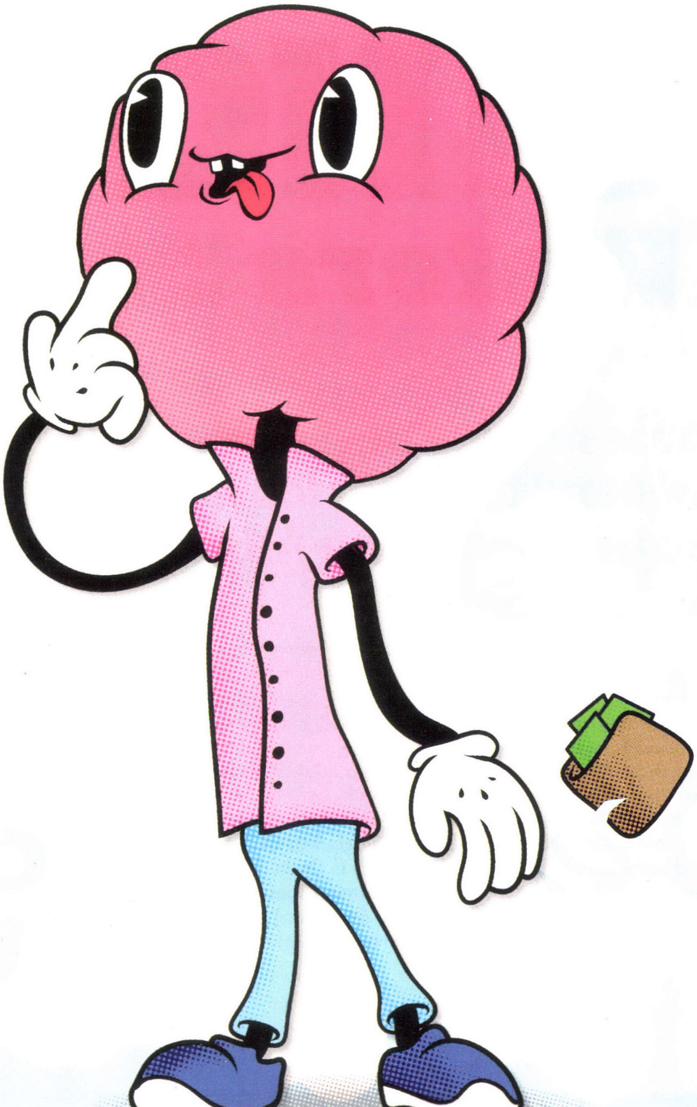
Finally, imagine that Caryn and Orlando go to the same car wash and each receives a loyalty card. Caryn's card says it requires 10 purchases for a free wash, but she gets a head start with two free stamps. Orlando doesn't get any free starter stamps, but his card only requires eight future purchases instead of 10. Both need just eight more stamps, but who do you think is more likely to return enough times to fill up his or her card?

It turns out that it's Caryn, who got saddled with a card that required 10 total stamps, but who received enough free stamps to get her 20 percent of the way toward her goal. This is thanks to a phenomenon called "the endowed progress effect."

> “We believe we will make use of [subscriptions] in the future...canceling requires admitting we failed.”
>
> **–*Kelly McGonigal, author of* The Willpower Instinct**

The idea is that when you give people *just a feeling* of advancement toward a distant goal, they're more likely to try harder to reach that goal, even relative to people who have an equally easy goal but who got no sense of momentum off the bat.

This little jump start is what happens every time retailers sign people up for programs that reward repeat business. The purchase you just made has gotten you started, and the idea that you're earning rewards is now incubating in your brain. Ever made a special trip to buy a game from some retailer just to earn more points? That's the endowed progress effect at work—we dislike abandoning goals once we feel like we've committed to them, and it can take surprisingly little to make us feel committed.



COUNTER POINTS

Microsoft isn't alone in the points game. Below is a summary of other systems gamers in the U.S. may encounter.

80 POINTS / $1.00

MICROSOFT POINTS

Platform: Xbox 360
Denominations: 400, 800, 1,600, 4,000

$1 / $1.00

DOLLARS

Platform: PlayStation 3
Denominations: Anything you like over $5, down to the penny

100 POINTS / $1.00

NINTENDO POINTS

Platform: Nintendo Wii, 3DS, & DSi
Denominations: 1,000, 2,000, 3,000

$1 / $1.00

STEAM WALLET FUNDS

(BASICALLY DOLLARS)

Platform: Steam (PC/Mac)
Denominations: 5, 10, 25, 50, 100
Note: Steam lets you buy games with a straight credit-card transaction, but in-game micropayments require Wallet funds.

BRIDGING Troubled Waters

WORDS BY **DAVID CHEN**

Video-game music's best and brightest band together for Japan with Play for Japan: the Album.

At Grasshopper Manufacture, March 11 began uneventfully, if a little more hectic than usual. Members of this tenaciously indie studio had just returned from the Game Developer's Conference in San Francisco, where the press played the irreverently over-the-top *Shadows of the Damned* for the first time. Armed with observations and feedback, the team had just entered the final stages of development.

By three that afternoon, the office looked and sounded much like any other in Tokyo, with shock and awe giving way to confusion and concern after the magnitude 9.0 earthquake. Studio frontman Suda Goichi and most of the senior staff were at an offsite meeting, compounding the chaos. Community Manager John Davis recalls that "half of us wanted to exit the building; the other half thought it was safer to stay inside." Unsurprisingly, he says, "We ended up with some people in the building and others scattered around Shinjuku." They soon reconvened at a nearby park, assembled, predictably, via Twitter.

▲ Although the game was delayed by a few weeks, *Shadows of the Damned* Community Manager John Davis is quick to reassure gamers that "the quakes didn't affect any of the game's content."

SIX-STRING SAMURAI

For fans of survival-horror, Akira Yamaoka needs little introduction. His work as composer and producer on such critically acclaimed titles as *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night* and *Silent Hill* have made him a legend of the Japanese video-game industry.

- *Snatcher* (1996)
- *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night* (1997)
- *Silent Hill series* (1999-2010)
- *Shadows of the Damned* (2011)

AFTER THE CHAOS

In the days that followed, Grasshopper Chief Sound Officer Akira Yamaoka found inspiration in the immediacy and impact of social networks. The earthquake and ensuing tsunami rocked a nation in an instant, but it took just moments for the rest of the world to take notice—and then action. "I was amazed at how many Facebook friends—business associates and fans I've met around the world, people who know me only through my music—reached out to me," Yamaoka recalls.

Fittingly, cross-cultural interaction at a personal scale is one of the characteristics that sets the studio behind such cult-hits as *No More Heroes* and *Killer 7* apart. With 150-plus creators representing 15 countries—including Australia, Colombia, Holland, and South Africa—Grasshopper's diversity drives innovation. "In game development," Yamaoka says, "you have so many ways to define 'cool.' What looks 'cool' to one person may look 'cute' to another—or on another spectrum completely. Having so many different people from different cultures gives us great perspective when creating games...It's a great asset."

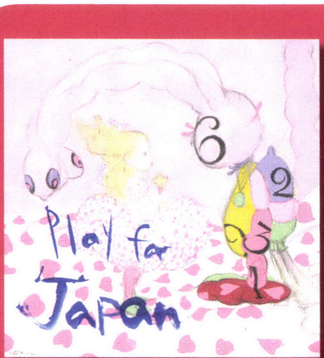
BREAKING DOWN BORDERS

The global outpouring of support from friends, colleagues, and strangers stirred Yamaoka to act the way he best knows how: through music. Channeling that energy, he sought support, extending the call to composers within and beyond Japan's shores. "For creators whose role is to inspire," he explains in an open letter posted online, "it's only fitting we come together, across borderlines, for those in need."

And within days it was all, in fact, coming together. Celebrated composers from some of the biggest franchises in games—such as Jason Graves *(Dead Space)*, Koji Kondo *(Super Mario Bros.)*, Woody Jackson *(Red Dead Redemption)*, and Nobuo Uematsu *(Final Fantasy)*—pledged support. Partnering with the industry-driven charity auction effort PlayforJapan.org provided a team able to help place the many pieces of this international puzzle.

Yamaoka concedes that commencing on one big project while completing another has been a challenge. "It's a lot of work, to be honest, but it's also a lot of fun...and I think people will hear this when they hear the music." And he's clearly eager to see this effort continue in spirit—in one form or another—noting that he's already been approached by "too many artists to fit on a single album." When pressed whether a second collection might then be in the works, his response is simple: "Twitter." G

*Visit **www.playforjapan.org** for more information about the album.*



◀ Art & Soul

Yoshitaka Amano's name may not be well known outside of "hardcore" game-art circles, but his long-running contributions to the *Final Fantasy* franchise, as well as in manga, anime (including *Gatchaman* and *Vampire Hunter D*), have made his lush style recognizable and broadly appealing. In addition to designing previous album covers for a heavy metal band he's participated in a number of collaborations with Western comic-book creators, including *Sandman* author Neil Gaiman.

That kind of experience made Yamaoka's decision easy. "Naturally, I was thinking about the music first—I'm a musician. But when the time came to think about art, my first choice was Yoshitaka Amano. Much to my surprise, he quickly agreed to help."

WORDS BY KAT BAILEY

STAR TREK

The highest-profile Star Trek game in years isn't just a spinoff. It's as close to canon as a Trek game is ever going to get.

It's a familiar sight for *Star Trek* fans: *The Enterprise* is wounded, surrounded by mines and held in place by mysterious tractor beams. Suddenly, Captain Kirk throws a shuttle into a violent dive, swooping past the saucer and around the drive section, finally crashing through a hatch and coming to a halt. "Reversing thrusters may have been a more pertinent method of deceleration," Spock says, drily.

This is *Star Trek* as envisioned by Digital Extremes. Their upcoming third-person co-op shooter —labeled simply *Star Trek*—follows some two years after the wildly successful movie reboot, filling the space between the first and the upcoming second film. It's the *Star Trek* where Kirk acts and Spock offers a cutting "Highly illogical, Captain."

U.S.S. ENTERPRISE
NCC-1701

For a studio best-known for its shooters—such as *Unreal Tournament*—this means turning *Trek* into a third-person, cover-based shooter with co-op elements. But it's a disservice to call it "Gears of Trek." This is not a game where Kirk and Spock exchange a fist bump after mowing down a hundred aliens.

Instead, Digital Extremes is accentuating other elements that make *Star Trek* popular—the problem-solving, the moral dilemmas, and, of course, the gadgets. But it starts with Kirk and Spock and what Digital Extremes terms as "asymmetrical co-op" in an adventure the studio claims is "as close to canon as you'll ever get for something that's not actually on celluloid."

KIRK AND SPOCK: DIFFERING STYLES

Kirk and Spock solve problems in vastly different ways, something the game showcases. Spock uses non-violent means to solve problems whenever possible, and Kirk has long been known as a cowboy. They contrast so much that Creative Director Steve Sinclair uses role-playing terminology to describe them, referring to Kirk as the "fighter" and Spock as "the mage." This is the starting point for *Star Trek*'s brand of co-op play, where items such as the

THE PEN BEHIND THE TREK

Robert Orci was entrusted with a role numerous writers would lust after: shaping Star Trek canon. Now that the 2009 reboot has established the new story-line, it's up to Orci to flesh out the series' most important relationship: the friendship of Captain James T. Kirk and Mr. Spock.

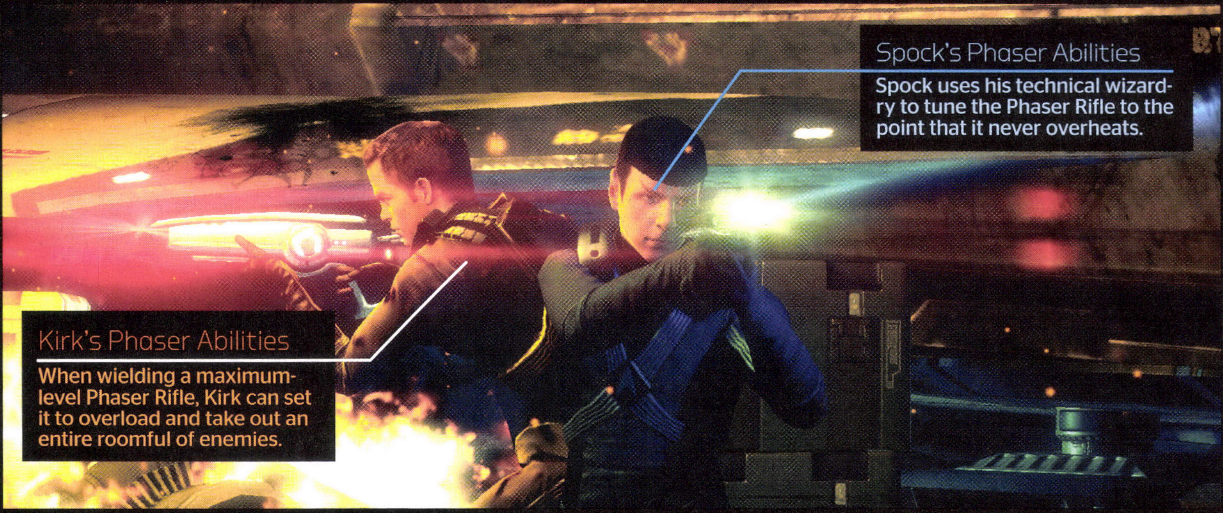
This doesn't mean that Orci wants to ditch the relationships, plots, and stories of the old one; rather, he wants to explore them. "In The Original Series they met the Doomsday Machine. What would happen if they met it now?

The game presents a special challenge: It's the first place where Orci further shapes the Kirk-Spock friendship, something he started in the reboot. "What's great about the game is that it gets to show that middle step. You get to see Kirk and Spock in a way you're not going to in the movie. They're becoming friends;

...THEY'RE GOING ON ADVENTURES YOU'RE NOT GOING TO SEE IN THE MOVIES."

A TALE OF TWO PHASER RIFLES

Star Trek is primarily a shooter, but it does feature some RPG elements, too. The weapon experience system—which unlocks new abilities for Spock and Kirk—is a good example of this.



Spock's Phaser Abilities

Spock uses his technical wizardry to tune the Phaser Rifle to the point that it never overheats.

Kirk's Phaser Abilities

When wielding a maximum-level Phaser Rifle, Kirk can set it to overload and take out an entire roomful of enemies.

THOSE WONDERFUL TOYS

Any Trekkie can tell you about the finer points of gadgets such as communicators, teleporters, and tricoders. Digital Extremes views gadgets in *Star Trek* akin to the role items play in *The Legend of Zelda*, says Creative Director Steve Sinclair: "Shigeru Miyamoto once said that the combat in *Zelda* is pacing in between the puzzle elements."

The 'Cryo Tool'

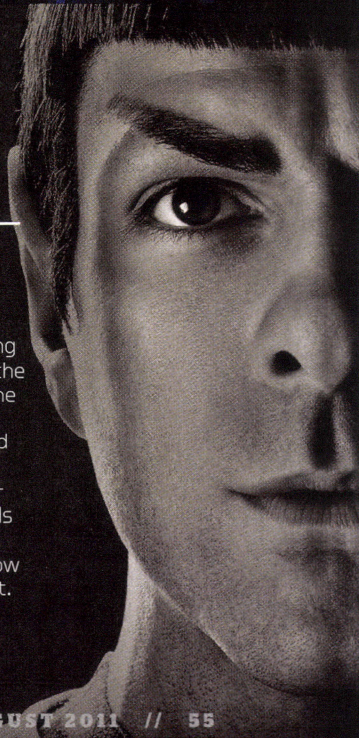
This can extinguish fires, freeze enemies, and even serve as a heat dissipater on phaser rifles. Every gadget has a passive ability that you can access when placed into the secondary weapon slot.

Subspace Grenades

Bullet-time in *Star Trek*? These grenades can slow down enemy fire—or even the foes themselves.

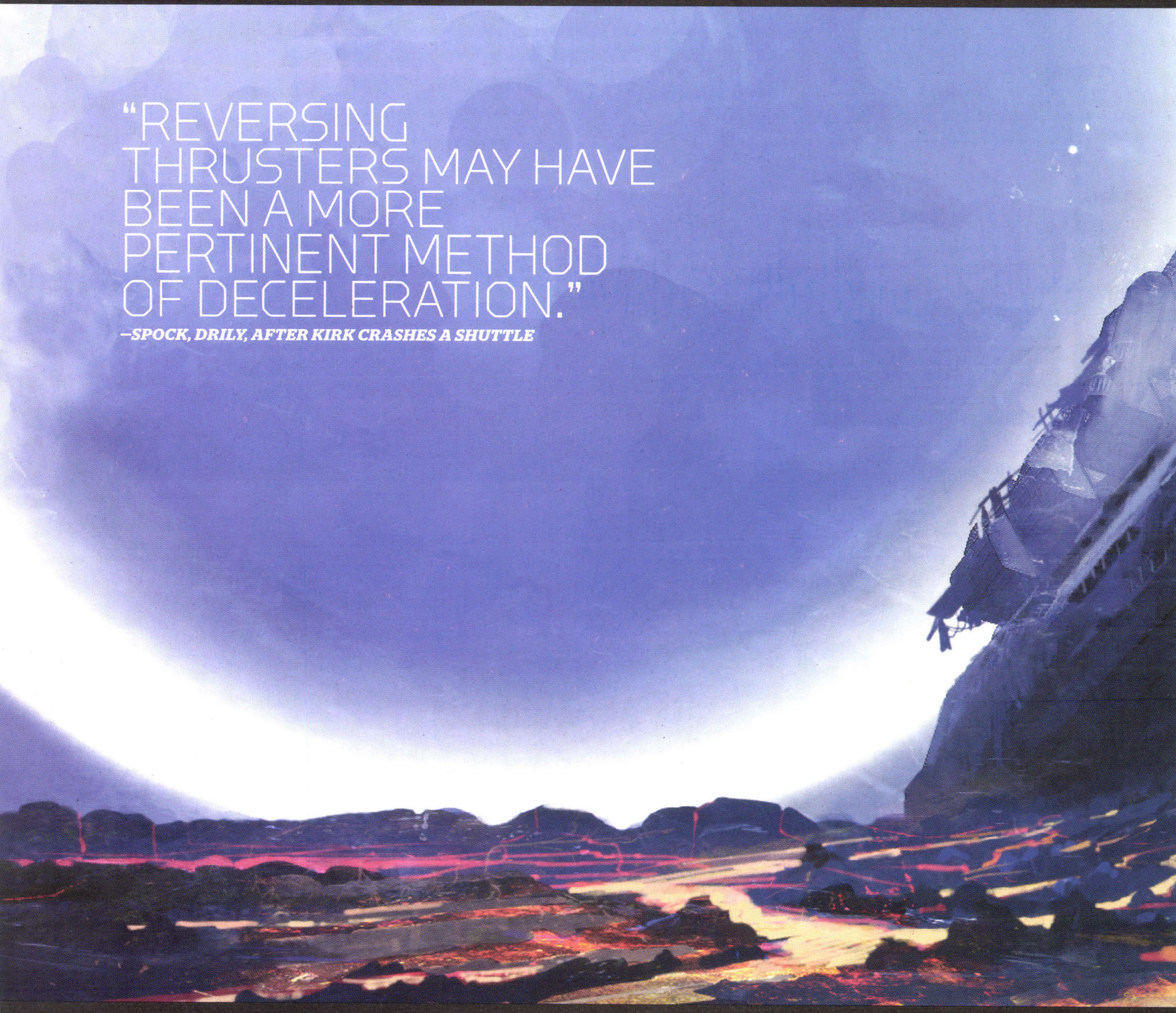
Better Tech through XP

Gadgets gain experience as the game goes on, bestowing special abilities to Kirk and Spock.



The Vulcan Neck Pinch

One of Leonard Nimoy's favorite stories about playing Spock is how he developed the Vulcan neck pinch. During one scene, Spock was supposed to sneak up behind a foe and karate chop them to the ground, like James Bond. Nimoy objected on the grounds that Spock is a pacifist, and instead he developed the now iconic neck pinch on the spot.



"REVERSING THRUSTERS MAY HAVE BEEN A MORE PERTINENT METHOD OF DECELERATION."

—SPOCK, DRILY, AFTER KIRK CRASHES A SHUTTLE

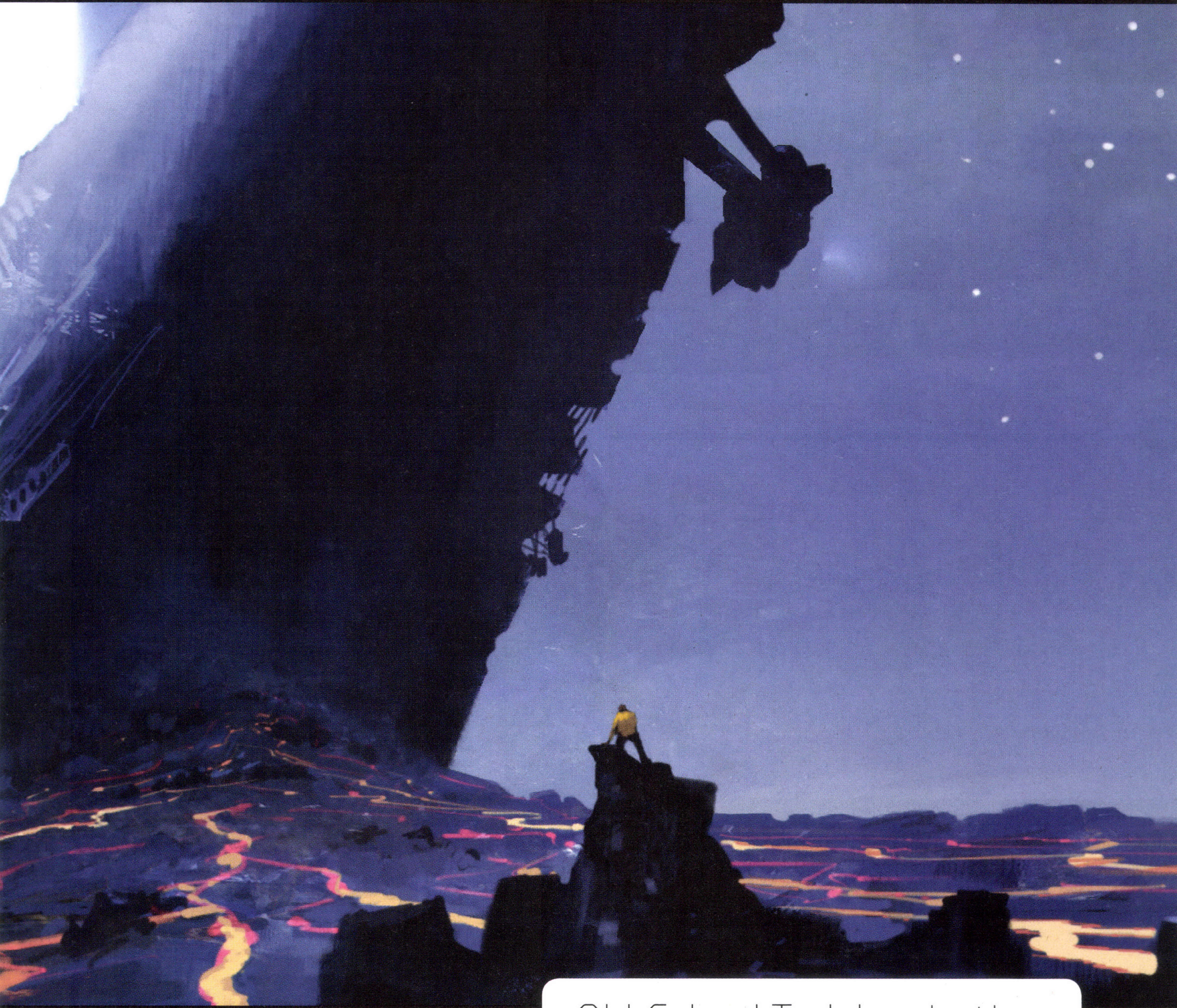
tricoder are just as important as a phaser.

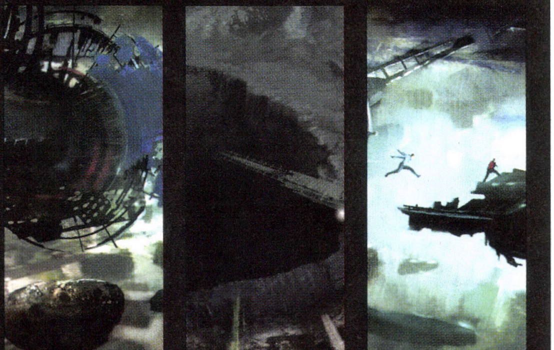
"If you look at the typical shooter, you generally go in and clear the room and headshot everyone. And if you die, you basically think, 'Well, maybe I should have gone left, or maybe I should have used my shotgun,'" Sinclair says. "But because of the adventure items, the 23rd century technology, and the special character abilities, you have multiple ways of getting through these scenarios in *Star Trek*, oftentimes nonlethally as well."

So while Kirk might focus on taking out enemies with his phaser (or punching fools in the face), Spock can bring all sorts of nifty tricks to bear. One gadget allows him to see through walls. Another allows Spock to temporarily confuse a foe, giving him enough time to overload a circuit and trap the enemy behind a door. And, of course, he has his trusty Vulcan neck pinch.

STRANGE NEW WORLDS

Reinforcing Digital Extremes' commitment to (relative) nonviolence is the complete lack of combat in the first portion of an early level. Kirk and Spock are investigating a distress call at a Vulcan station orbiting the star Hellios. The enemy is not hostile aliens—it's a malfunctioning deflector shield. Sinclair sees this scenario as a simple matter of sticking to the ethos of *Trek*. "We felt really strongly that if the first thing you do





Old-School Trek Inspiration

The foundation for Digital Extremes' approach to Star Trek is the 1966 episode "The Man Trap." Creative Director Steve Sinclair describes the scene in which Kirk and Spock have their backs to some "papier-mâché rocks" as the Salt Vampire lurks nearby. Their task is to subdue a man who believes the creature is his dead wife.

"Kirk whispers, 'That way,' and draws him out before Spock stuns him with his phaser," Sinclair says. "It was certainly no Joan Collins episode ["The City on the Edge of Forever"], but it was pretty awesome that those two characters in particular—Bones was obviously the balance between them—were in action so often in The Original Series."

"OUR MOTTO FOR THIS GAME IS 'ADVENTURE, NOT WAR.'"
—**STEVE SINCLAIR, DIGITAL EXTREMES**

is shoot someone, then we're doing it wrong," Sinclair says.

The opening segment relies on puzzles. Spock uses his tricorder to override the controls to a door, and they work together to pry it open. Later, they have to steadily work their way across the station's exterior, using phasers to blow open panels that serve as cover against periodic blasts of intense heat from the nearby star.

What's really neat are the segments with the control panels, which are literally Flash games. Digital Extremes' modified engine uses Flash to integrate actual images from the movie. So when Spock or Kirk interact with a control panel, a brief mini-game ensues that reflects the classic look and feel of *Star Trek*.

INTO THE BREACH

You catch a glimpse of the final game in what follows after Kirk and Spock crash into the *Enterprise* cargo hold. All is quiet as they creep through the cavernous shuttle bay, Spock scanning fallen crewmembers to find that they've been afflicted by a mysterious toxin.

Moments later they are attacked by the *Enterprise*'s

WHAT ABOUT THE NEXT MOVIE?

Paramount and Bad Robot have been mum about the details of the next movie, but that hasn't stopped some of the Star Trek fans from speculating on what to expect.

One thing we do know is that Khan isn't making an appearance, as the development team has said they want to let Star Trek II stand on its own. The time is ripe to introduce a good villain, though, and what better villain could there be than the Klingons? After all, these are the guys that murdered Kirk's son.

Barring the Klingons, there's still plenty of TOS material to draw from. They probably won't be pay a visit to Talos IV, but there's always the godlike Trelane, the Mirror universe, and even Tribbles. While not certain, odds are that the Klingons will be rearing their ugly heads in the second movie.

WHO YOU GONNA FIGHT?

WE HAVE THE ODDS

Star Trek has built up an amazing cast of villains over the past 40 years. But Digital Extremes and Paramount is keeping quiet on which enemy is appearing in the game, so *GamePro*'s forecasting who will be the big bad—and the odds of their making an appearance. Who knows? Kirk may yet be fighting Ferengi.

Romulans

Romulans, of course, were the foes in the reboot. But they weren't really the Romulans of the new *Star Trek*—they were from the original *Trek* timeline, after all (and those miners looked more like bikers, anyway). This would be a great time to show off the power of the Romulan Empire.

Odds: 10-to-1

Klingons

Star Trek's iconic villains didn't get any real screen time in the reboot (a few Klingon "Warbirds" appeared in the *Kobayashi Maru* scene). It's a safe bet that the game (and the sequel) will showcase these fan favorites.

Odds: 3-to-1

Orion Syndicate

The Orion Syndicate aren't the most iconic *Trek* villains. In *Star Trek: Enterprise*, we learned that it's actually the Orion females (the green slave girls of yore) who control the Syndicate. Their shadowy history, combined with Kirk's weakness for the ladies, would make them a compelling villain.

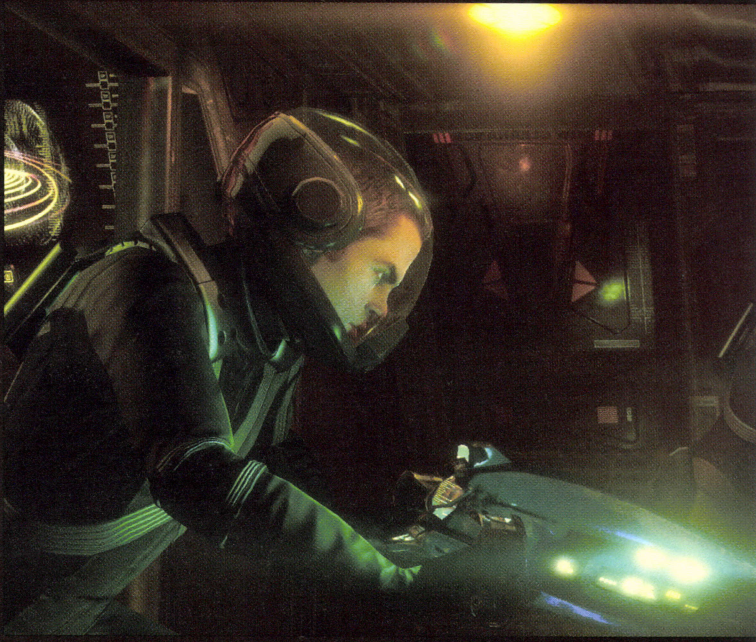
Odds: 15-to-1

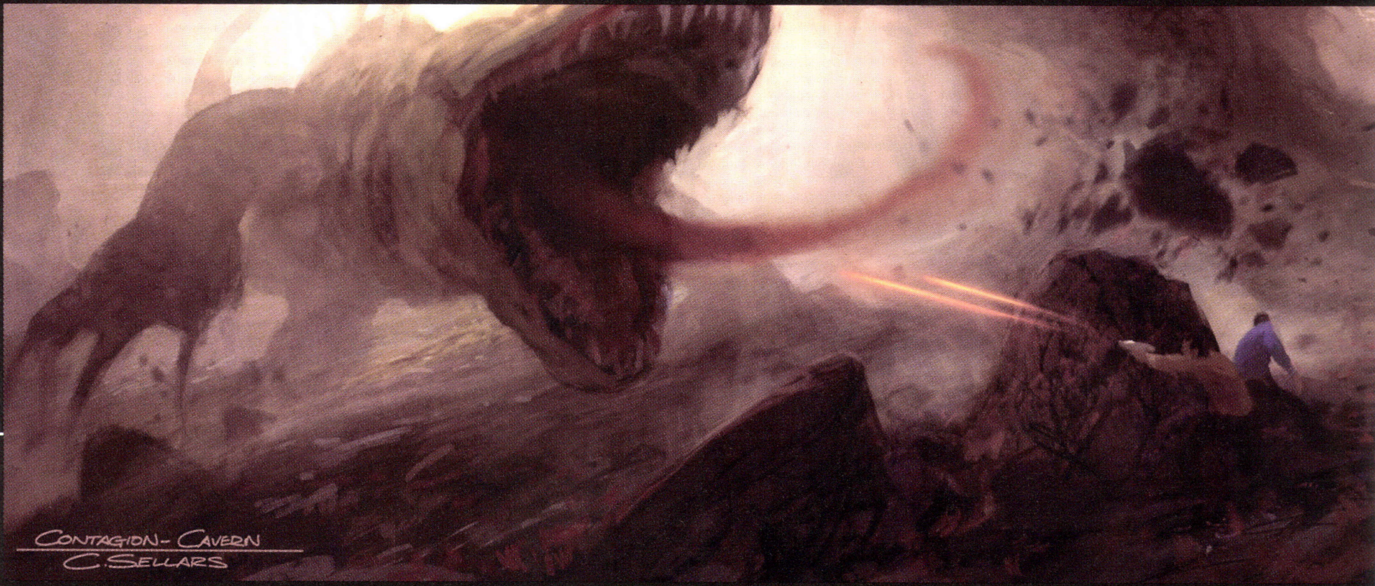
hijackers, and Kirk is hit by the poison, forcing him to fire blind. Spock drags Kirk to sickbay while the captain tries to fend off the attackers. Spock dumps Kirk on a bio bed and uses the medical screen to combat the toxin, *Trauma Center*–style, while Kirk battles the assailants, with precious time ticking away as Spock works.

Spock saves Kirk, but the pair are dragged up to the bridge by the attackers to release the ship's command lockout.

"You want a ship?" Kirk quips as a he hits the remote control for the shuttle. The perspective then switches to the *Enterprise*'s exterior, requiring you to take control of the shuttle and drive it directly into the bridge. Moments later, it smashes through the viewscreen, sending the attackers into space. Spock gropes for the controls on the navigation board to bring down the emergency bulkheads and save them from a similar fate.

Yes, this is *Star Trek*. And it's only a tiny slice of what to expect from Digital Extremes, offering one more stepping stone in the evolution of Kirk and Spock when it arrives next year. It's early yet, but it's clear that Bad Robot, Paramount, and Digital Extremes have high expectations for what figures to be the highest-profile *Star Trek* game in years.





Gorn

The Gorn have made just three appearances in *Star Trek* (their first was the famous episode where Kirk fights the repillain captain). But the Gorn play roles in the *Starfleet Command* tactical space-battle series and *Star Trek Online*; maybe it's time for them to take the villainous spotlight.

Odds:20-to-1

Borg

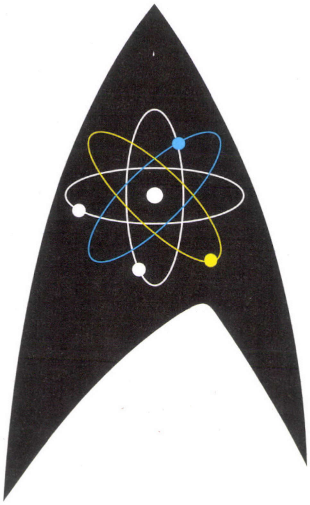
The Borg are rooted in the *Next Generation* universe. In fact, fans even decried a relatively plausible appearance in *Star Trek: Enterprise*. The odds are against Kirk throwing down with the Federation's cybernetic foes (as awesome as that might be), but don't put it past the writers to sneak them in.

Odds: 100-to-1

Ferengi

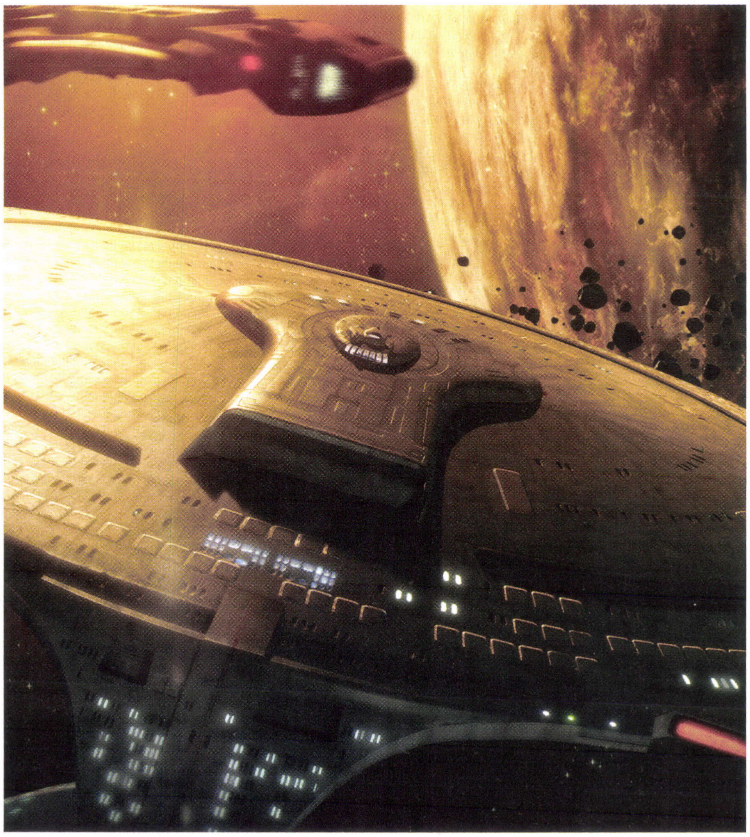
The idea is ludicrous. The Ferengi were designed for *The Next Generation* as the Federation's new foe, but the greedy little trolls were too ridiculous to take seriously. With their conniving natures, thirst for profit, and odd habits, the Ferengi are better off as a source of comedy than of hostility.

Odds: Off the Scale



THE REAL SCIENCE OF

STAR TREK



ANDREW GROEN boldly goes where many nerds have gone before...only he's using science to scrutinize Star Trek's universe and technology.

From *Star Trek*'s warp-drive physics and the explosive potential of antimatter engines to the series' transporter technology that allows people to be "beamed" from place to place, I'm putting one of the greatest sci-fi sagas under the microscope. Will we ever really explore strange new worlds or seek out new life and civilizations? Will we eventually boldly go where no man has gone before? We look to science to help us answer these questions as we uncover how much of *Star Trek* is scientifically possible.

STAR TREK
BY DAVID, SUTTON & VILLAGRAN
52
$1.00

01.

ANTIMATTER ENGINE

Star Trek uses antimatter drives to satisfy the energy needs of starships. Antimatter sounds like sci-fi, but it's real. It's made of atoms with an opposite charge to normal matter (positively charged electrons and negatively charged protons).

When antimatter collides with normal matter, it's obliterated, releasing huge amounts of energy. This would make an efficient fuel. But there's a problem.

"We make antimatter in particle accelerators by colliding particles together with huge amounts of energy," says Dr. Lawrence Krauss, the author of *The Physics of* Star Trek. "The process is inefficient, and very little antimatter is created, but we nevertheless can work with it. However, it would take thousands of times the gross national product of the U.S. to produce enough antimatter to light up a lightbulb."

Further problems creep up with the storage of antimatter. Objects with the same electric charge repel each other, but objects with opposite charges (like matter and antimatter) attract. If you don't have enormous magnetic containment systems, the matter and antimatter will attract and destroy each other.

Unless we can come up with new ways of creating and storing antimatter, it's unlikely we'll ever see this type of spaceship engine become a reality.

Verdict

Unlikely

STAR TREK VI
THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY

02.

WARP DRIVE

The advances of the *Star Trek* universe are useless without the capability to seek out new worlds with lightspeed travel. Warp drive offers an exploratory sense of adventure that gives us hope that someday, we'll be able to expand beyond this planet—even if our grouchy physics teachers claim it's impossible. They may be right, but *Star Trek* at least has one interesting, impractical idea on how to do it.

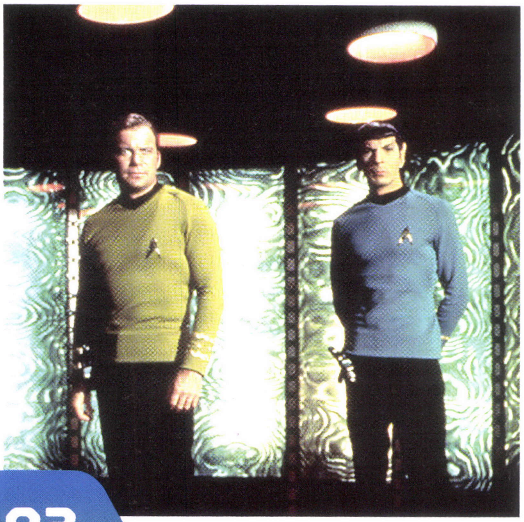
Starfleet ships create distortions in the fabric of space-time and essentially ride them like waves. There's no need to use costly fuels to accelerate the ship or deal with bothersome rules like $E=MC^2$.

But as with many concepts of the far future, we can't fathom the amounts of energy this would require. Consider the following: Precise measurements of stars around the Sun show that the Sun does indeed bend space (and the light from those stars) around it. But it takes all of the incredible mass and energy of the sun to warp light just a few millimeters.

Clearly, harnessing this kind of technology is beyond our grasp. The physics is interesting, but this idea might as well be impossible.

Verdict

Very Unlikely



03.

BEAM ME UP!

Perhaps the most famous aspect of *Star Trek* is the transporter Starfleet uses to get their people from ship to ship and from orbit to the ground. In the blink of an eye an officer can be dematerialized and then reappear at the desired location.

Unfortunately, there are some major problems with *Trek*'s treatment of this. Rather than trying to map the body then assemble it with identical materials on the other end of the trip (like in *StarCraft*,) *Star Trek* employs a system called a matter stream. Whatever needs to be transported gets dematerialized down to its constituent parts. The person is ripped apart into a stream of subatomic particles and is then reassembled upon reaching the destination.

This may sound okay at first, but it breaks down upon examination. As Krauss explains in the *The Physics of* Star Trek, a body would need to be heated to literally billions of degrees in order to rip atoms apart. This is a level of energy only found naturally in the nuclear furnaces of stars. The energy output needed to accomplish this would be outrageous and would make it completely unfeasible for everyday use.

So for *Star Trek* officers looking to get around quickly, it seems an everyday boarding craft would be the most economical and realistic solution.

Verdict

Impossible

04.

UNIVERSAL TRANSLATOR

By the 24th century, translation technology had advanced to the point that universal translators could be built directly into their communicators. The translators use algorithms to translate entire languages.

We actually have fairly sophisticated translation devices, although anyone hoping for the miracles displayed in *Star Trek* will probably be disappointed. Devices like the Voxtec Phraselator P2 can recognize and translate very well, and they are often used in bilingual hospitals and warzones.

But learning new languages algorithmically is likely impossible. All efforts to decode languages and find universal common threads have been unsuccessful.

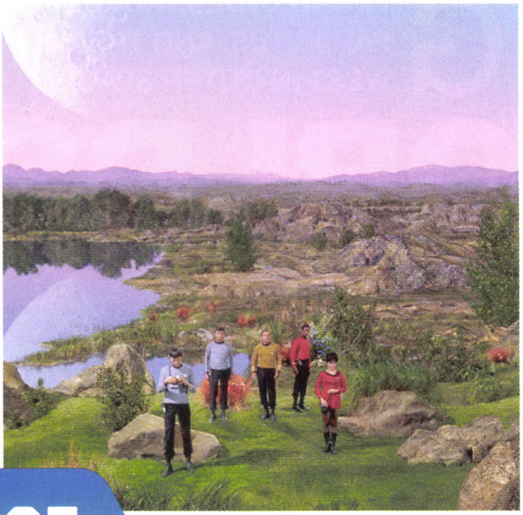
"Syntactic, semantic, and even phonetic representation carries ambiguities that mankind usually resolves naturally, but not without difficulty," says a representative of Aptek, which makes voice recognition and automatic translation hardware and software.

The problem is that there are so many irremovable variables that change the speech. Even if a machine understands perfect English, it wouldn't be able to figure out *imperfect* English, which is what we speak. There are countless dialects of every single language, and hundreds of languages on our planet alone.

Even if this hurdle is surmounted, languages still can't be translated directly. Direct translations end up ridiculous because languages are full of instances where the speaker says something they don't mean, but a skilled listener understands what they mean.

Verdict

Improbable



05.

MISSING ELEMENTS

Several *Star Trek* plots deal with discovering elements that aren't in the periodic table. Is this even possible? Is the Periodic Table of the Elements just a mashup of our temporary knowledge about the atomic world? Or is it an unassailable masterwork?

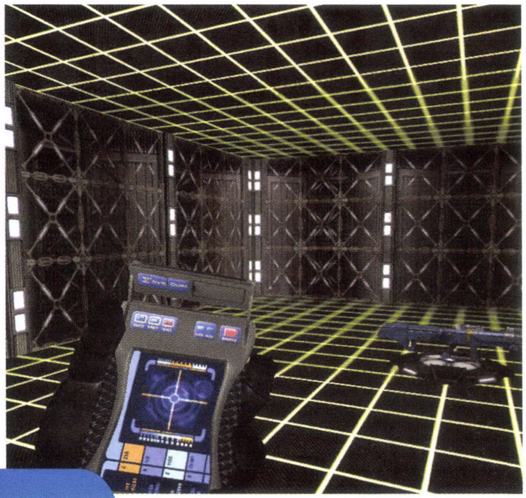
"Each element's spot on the periodic table is equal to the number of protons it has," says Sam Kean, the author of *The Disappearing Spoon*, a history of the elements in human civilization. "So hydrogen has one proton, helium two protons, uranium 92 protons. We also know that each of the spots on the table is filled in already, and you can't have a fractional number of protons, so there won't be any strange new elements lurking in between."

But scientists are creating new elements at the bottom of the periodic table, such as Ununseptium in January 2010. "Those elements are so unstable [most fall apart in just milliseconds] that it's unlikely we could find a stable cache of them on some distant planet or something," Kean says. "There's always a chance that there's new antimatter elements out there. These are like the bizarro, inverse versions of the elements."

A theoretical idea, the "island of stability," could reveal new elements at the table's bottom. The idea is certain extra-large sizes and shapes of elements could balance the Weak Force (radioactive decay) and the Strong Force (holds together the nucleus).

While unlikely, who knows what kind of discoveries are waiting in the field of antimatter.

Verdict
Unlikely



06.

HOLODECK

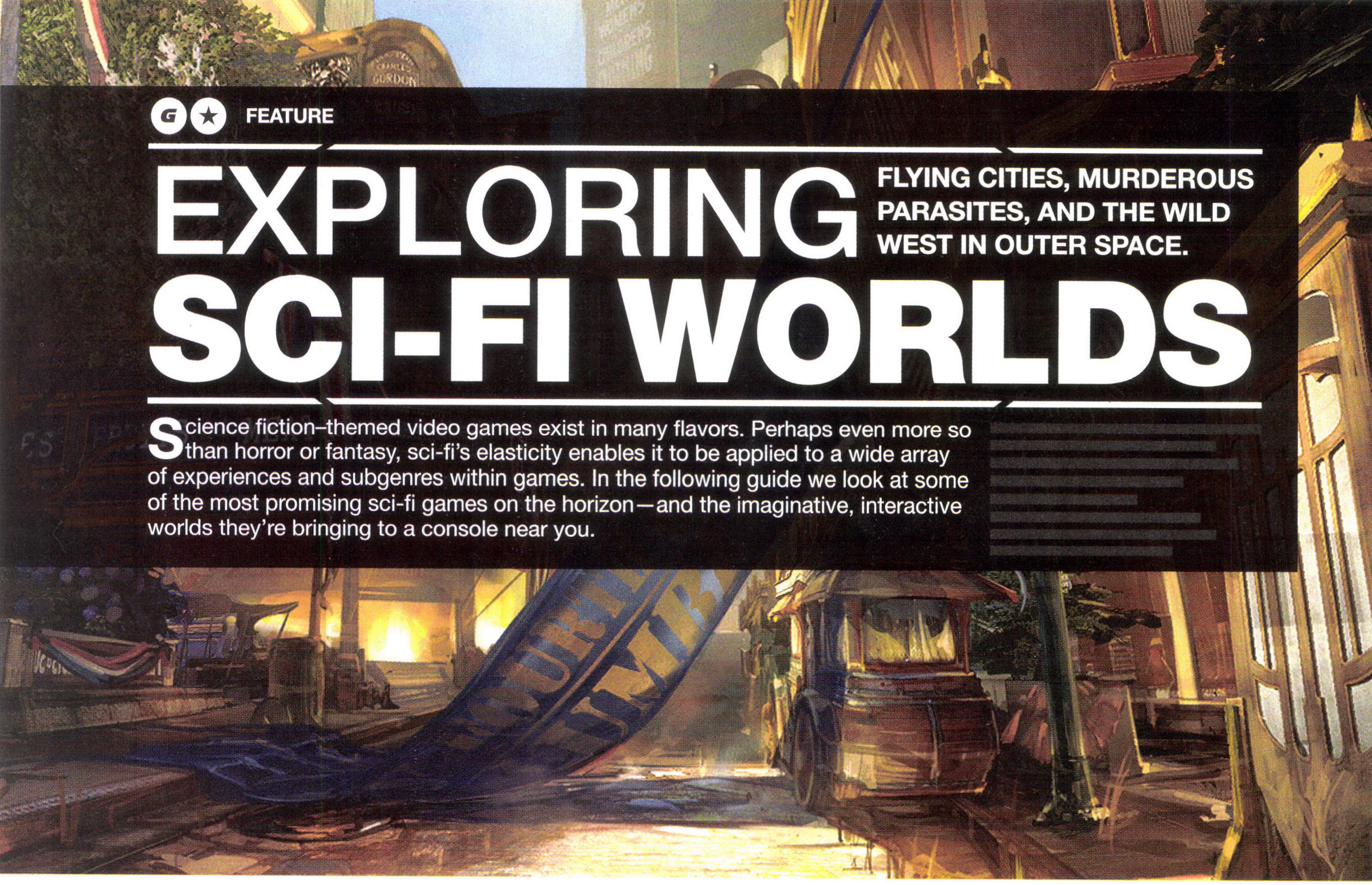
Alright, now I know I don't need to tell you that the holodeck is possible. The gaming industry is surrounded by incredible 3D experiences that take us to amazing new worlds. The realism of graphics is climbing, along with the capability of high-powered consoles to process more and more information. Humans have achieved photorealism in digital environments, and digital human faces will likely be photorealistic soon.

Can we build a holodeck right now? No, but it's almost certainly not very far off. In *The Science of 3D Gaming* (August 2010, No. 263), we spoke with an optics researcher and 3D technology professor who told us that the next step is to create wall-sized—and ultimately wrap-around—3D TVs.

Then, you'd be able to couple that technology with a haptic (touch) interface, so you'd be able to actually feel and touch the things in your environment. From there it's not hard to imagine a system like *Super Scribblenauts* or *LittleBigPlanet* that could generate new items for the environment. The building blocks of the technology are all here; we just need to make it economically feasible to package them together.

It's hard to say if we'll ever achieve the feats of the holodeck (like replaying full 3D reenactments from ship security cameras), but it's very likely that we'll continue building toward this tech over the next two decades.

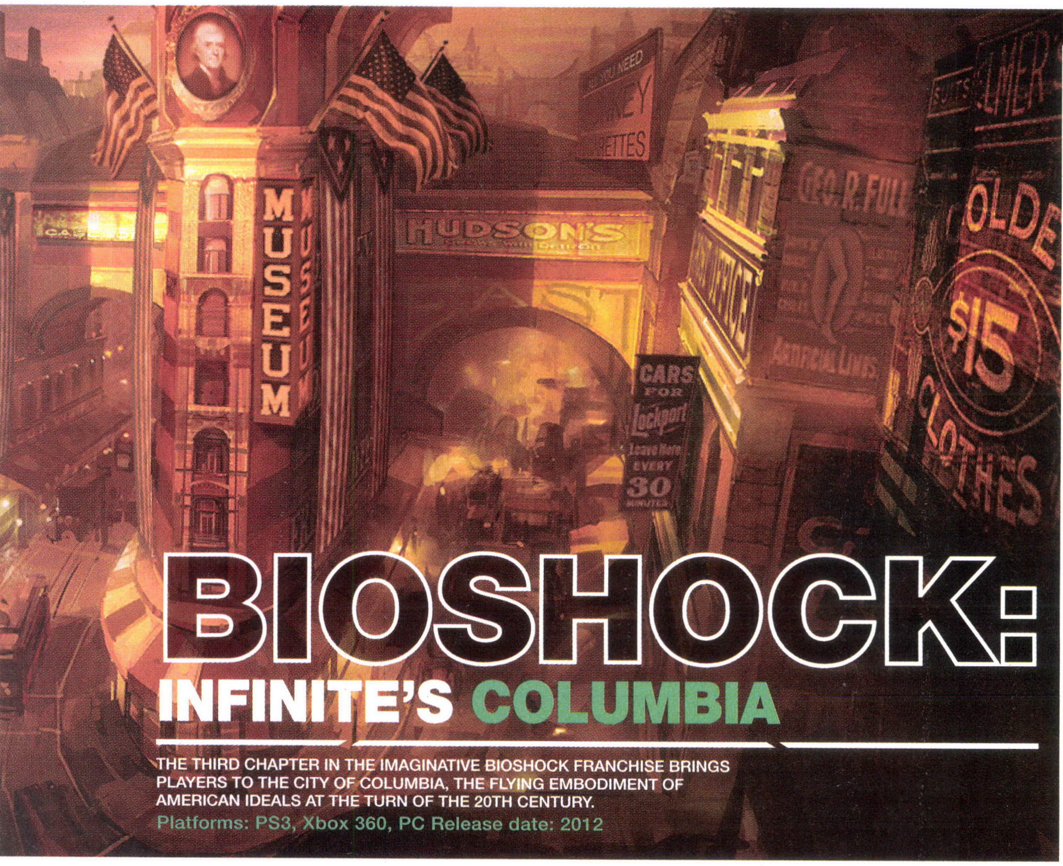
Verdict
Possible



EXPLORING SCI-FI WORLDS

FLYING CITIES, MURDEROUS PARASITES, AND THE WILD WEST IN OUTER SPACE.

Science fiction–themed video games exist in many flavors. Perhaps even more so than horror or fantasy, sci-fi's elasticity enables it to be applied to a wide array of experiences and subgenres within games. In the following guide we look at some of the most promising sci-fi games on the horizon—and the imaginative, interactive worlds they're bringing to a console near you.



BIOSHOCK: INFINITE'S COLUMBIA

THE THIRD CHAPTER IN THE IMAGINATIVE BIOSHOCK FRANCHISE BRINGS PLAYERS TO THE CITY OF COLUMBIA, THE FLYING EMBODIMENT OF AMERICAN IDEALS AT THE TURN OF THE 20TH CENTURY.

Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC Release date: 2012

Words by **Patrick Shaw**

Irrational Games are masters at crafting fictional worlds that bend the imagination to its limits. They call it "building video-game worlds as main characters." *BioShock: Infinite*'s city of Columbia—a massive metropolis suspended in the clouds—is no exception to this design philosophy.

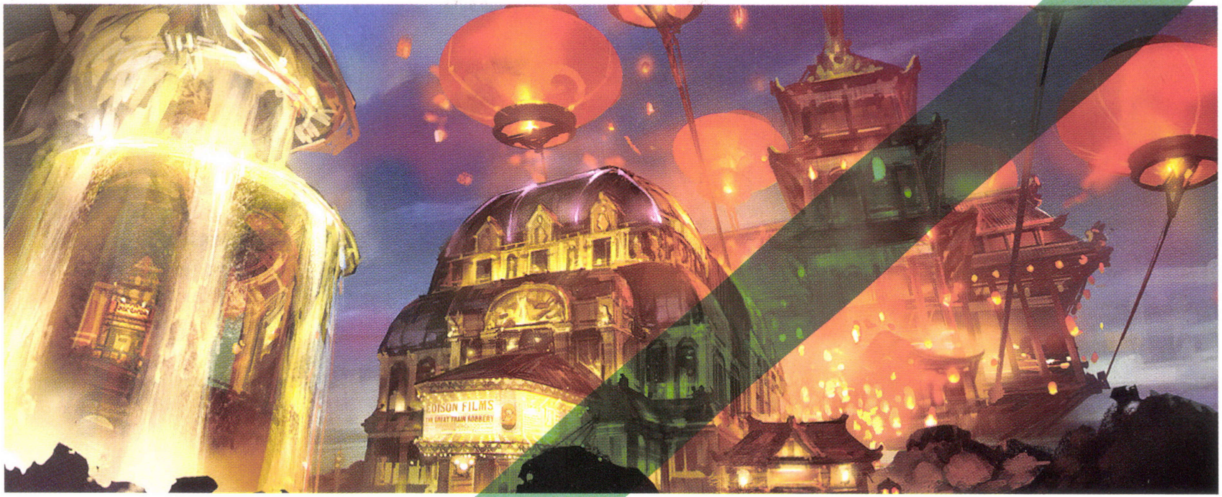
"Anyone who's played an Irrational game before—they are often intimately tied to places, whether that's an underwater city or a faster-than-light starship," says Steve Gaynor, a senior designer at Irrational Games. He explains that the team was fortunate enough to have a lot of time to figure out where to go after Rapture, the underwater dystopia featured in *BioShock* and *BioShock 2*. They considered numerous time periods for the upcoming game until the team decided

FLYING CITIES IN FICTION

Cloud City
(from the Star Wars series):
An outpost floating above the planet Bespin, Cloud City is home to everyone's favorite smooth-talking smuggler, Lando Calrissian.

Laputa
(from the novel Gulliver's Travels):
Jonathan Swift's flying island is composed of "adamantine" rock and home to snooty aristocrats. Interestingly, "la puta" means "the whore" in Spanish.

New Pork City
(from the game EarthBound 2):
The final, ridiculously named world in the game features flying limos, the Pigmask Army, and, of course, the Empire Porky Building.



HOW DOES IT FLY?

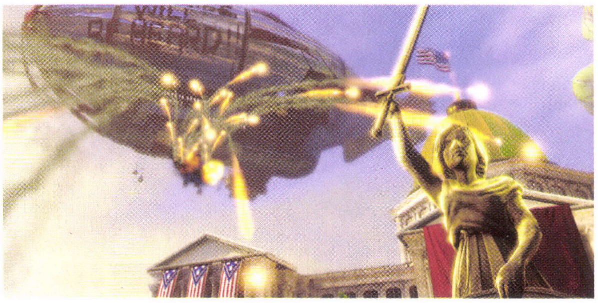
Built during the rise of American exceptionalism at the turn of the 20th century, *BioShock: Infinite*'s Columbia employs self-sustaining balloons and huge reactors in order to keep the enormous manmade city afloat.

on America during the turn of the 20th century. The idea of a city in the sky emerged from the tremendous sense of optimism the nation experienced during the early 1900s, which was reflected in everything from art to politics.

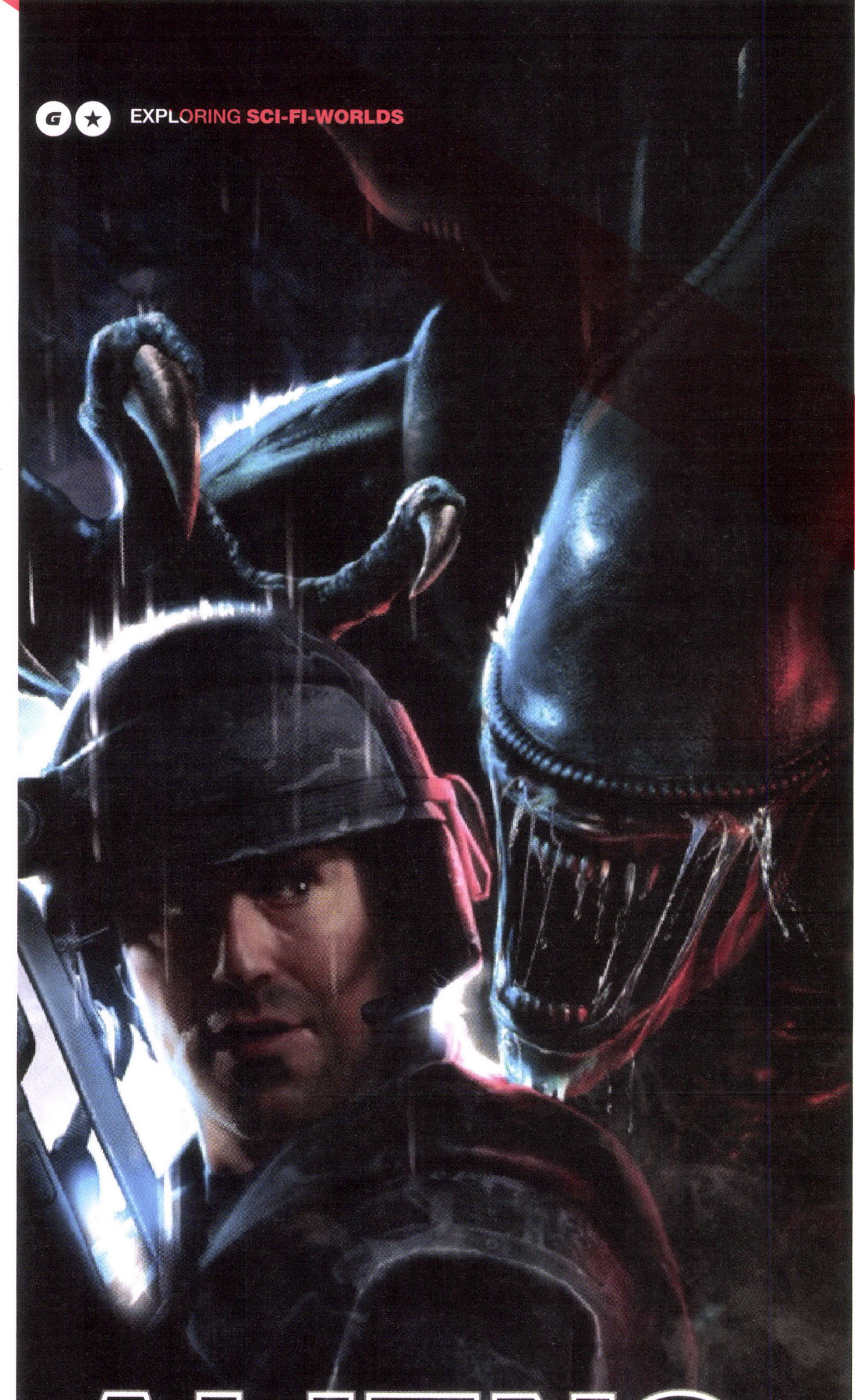
"If you look at the art at the time, especially the science fiction, there was always this sense that people would eventually be living in the clouds," says Ken Levine, the creative director and cofounder of Irrational. "They had so much change in technology in the years preceding that—electricity, TV, movies, cars, airplanes—in a 20-year period. You think about our lives... the only thing that's happened in the last 20 years on that scale's the Internet. They had like seven or 10 Internets."

Infinite's team points out that if you look at how real cities are constructed, all the buildings aren't made at the same time. The same is true for Columbia. While the team began with the notion of a floating world in their alternate version of 1912, there are things they've created more recently that stray from that aesthetic. As a result of these different layers, a history of the city has taken shape. "The city we started with and the city we end with mesh just like a city aging," says Nate Wells, the art director at Irrational. "It looks like a 20-year-old city rather than one that was just born."

COLUMBIA TRANSIT



> "If you look at the art at the time, especially the science fiction, there was always this sense that people would eventually be living in the clouds."
>
> *—Ken Levine, Irrational Games creative director*



ALIENS: COLONIAL MARINES' LV-426

PLUMB THE NIGHTMARISH DEPTHS OF THE ABANDONED SULACO SPACESHIP AND THE BLOOD-FREEZING PLANET LV-426—AND FACE OFF AGAINST THE DEADLY ALIEN XENOMORPHS.

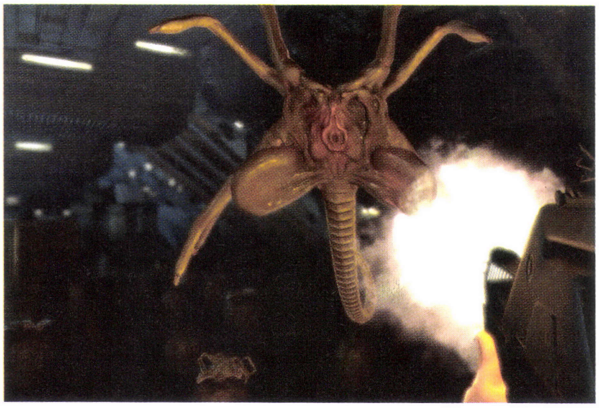
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC Release date: 2011

Orbiting the ringed planet Calpamos, LV-426 is a moon central to both James Cameron's *Aliens* and Gearbox Software's upcoming shooter *Aliens: Colonial Marines* for one reason: A colony of parasitic Xenomorphs resides here. The planet's also the site of the crashed ship of the "Space Jockey," the single most mysterious and debated lifeform in *Alien* lore. LV-426's climate is inhospitable to humans, with an atmosphere composed of nitrogen and methane and temperatures as low as -111 Celsius (-168 Fahrenheit).

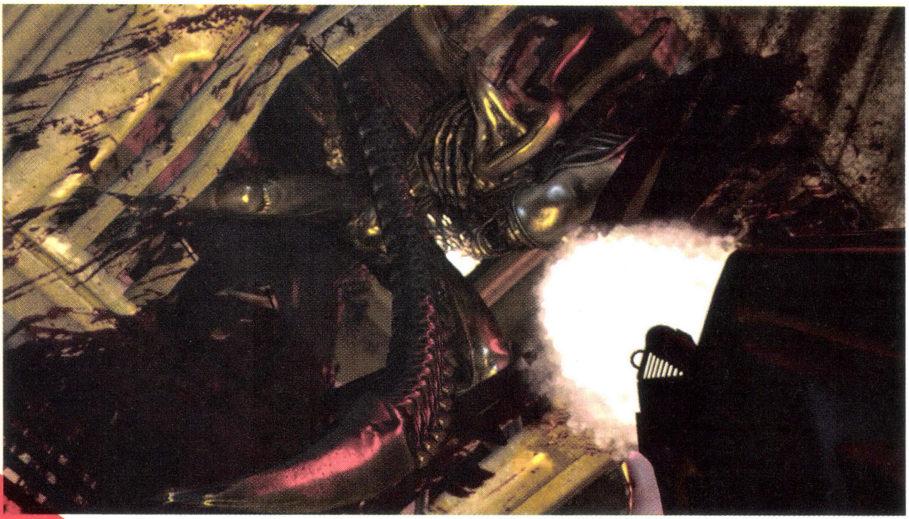
Aliens: Colonial Marines picks up after the events of David Fincher's *Alien 3*. At the film's conclusion, Ellen Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) discovers an Alien Queen embryo is gestating inside her, so she cremates herself by leaping right into a giant furnace. In the game, you play as a squad of United States Colonial Marines (USCMC)—each of whom have their own distinct skills and weapons—sent to investigate Ripley's death along with the rest of the horrific events that took place on LV-426.

While Gearbox isn't restricting themselves creatively, they care about building a version of LV-426 that's authentic to the one featured in Cameron's seminal sci-fi film. They've even gone as far as using the original set designs from *Aliens* to re-create the world for *Aliens: Colonial Marines*. Syd Mead, a "visual futurist" and artist who worked on *Aliens* (and also *Bladerunner* and the original *Tron*), was also contracted to expand the universe he originally created for the *Alien* film by designing new locations in *Colonial Marines*.

Gearbox Software is fortunate enough to have a rich sci-fi foundation forged by minds like Ridley Scott, James Cameron, H.R. Giger, Mead, and a number of others. But fans can rest assured that they'll be visiting all-new unexplored areas of the *Alien* universe in an experience Game Director Randy Pitchford promises to be "awesome."



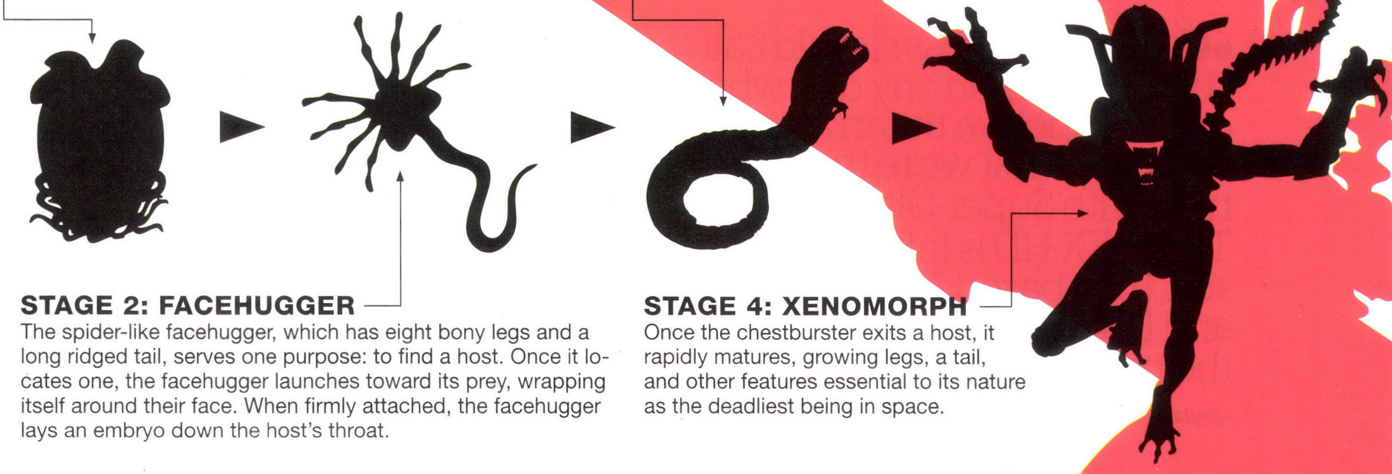
> "Some people would say my paintings show a future world, and maybe they do. But I paint from reality."
>
> ***—H.R. Giger, Swiss surrealist who designed the alien Xenomorphs***



BIOLOGY OF A **XENOMORPH**

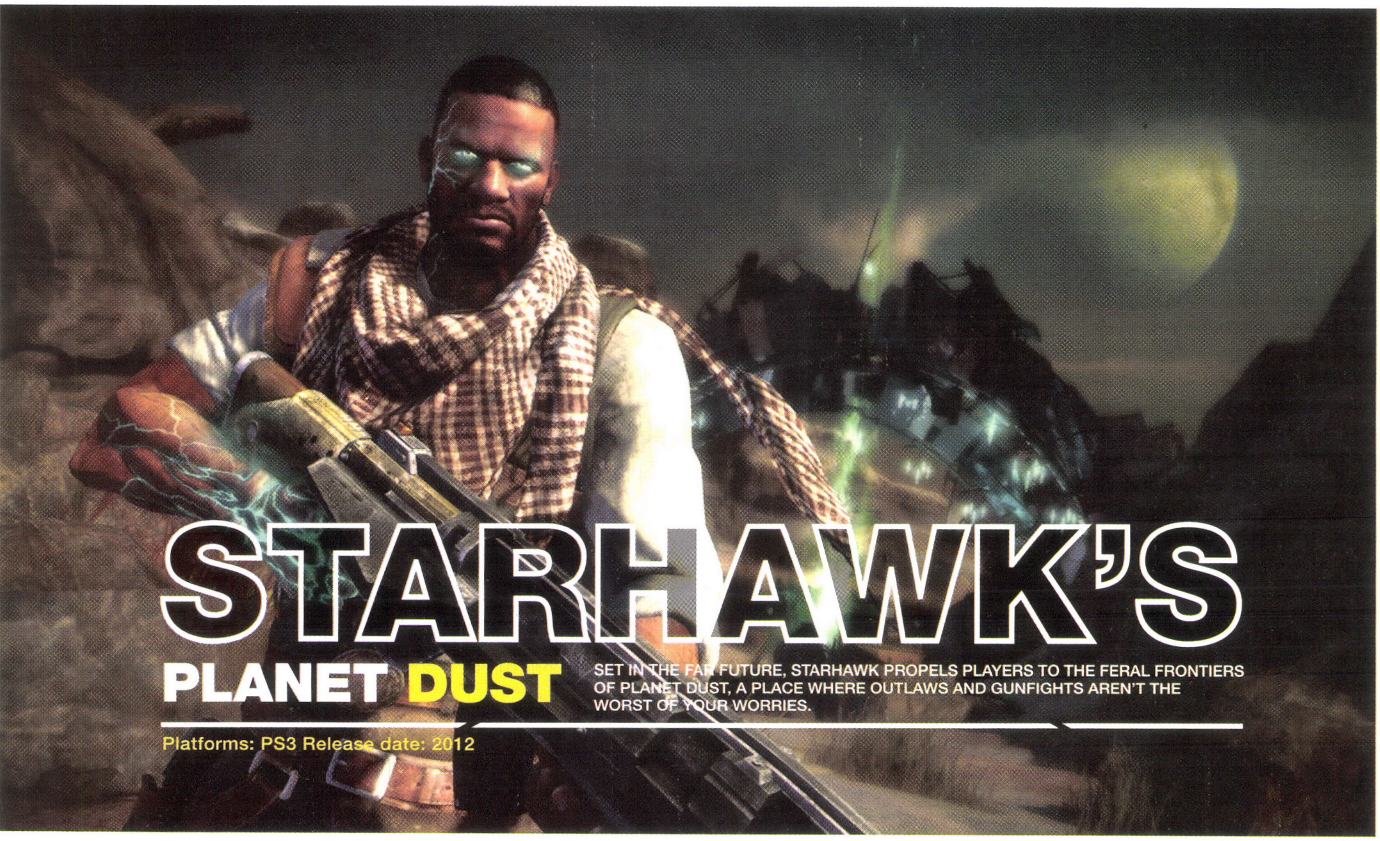
STAGE 1: EGG
The lifecycle of a Xenomorph begins as a slimy egg birthed by a hive Queen. As the creature inside develops, the egg's thick membrane eventually peels back and discharges the next nightmarish stage of the Xenomorph: the facehugger.

STAGE 3: CHESTBURSTER
As the embryo gestates within the body, stage 3 sets in, and a phallic, limbless critter erupts from of the chest of the host. The creature bursts straight through ribs, vital organs, and everything else in the way, leading to an excruciatingly painful death for the host.



STAGE 2: FACEHUGGER
The spider-like facehugger, which has eight bony legs and a long ridged tail, serves one purpose: to find a host. Once it locates one, the facehugger launches toward its prey, wrapping itself around their face. When firmly attached, the facehugger lays an embryo down the host's throat.

STAGE 4: XENOMORPH
Once the chestburster exits a host, it rapidly matures, growing legs, a tail, and other features essential to its nature as the deadliest being in space.



STARHAWK'S PLANET DUST

SET IN THE FAR FUTURE, STARHAWK PROPELS PLAYERS TO THE FERAL FRONTIERS OF PLANET DUST, A PLACE WHERE OUTLAWS AND GUNFIGHTS AREN'T THE WORST OF YOUR WORRIES.

Platforms: PS3 **Release date:** 2012

While it retains *Warhawk*'s signature blend of aerial and ground combat, the spinoff *Starhawk* is quite unlike the rest of the franchise. The most dramatic change is a fully realized story-line, something 2007's *Warhawk* lacked entirely, as it's multiplayer only. *Starhawk* supports multiplayer, but their imaginative new world, Planet Dust, plays a pivotal role.

LightBox Interactive calls *Starhawk*'s planet a "lawless frontier of space." One look at Planet Dust and you'll understand that this isn't your typical futuristic planet, but a realm as influenced by the aesthetic of the American Old West as it is by traditional science-fiction. As mercenary Emmet Graves, you explore Planet Dusk, which is home to one of

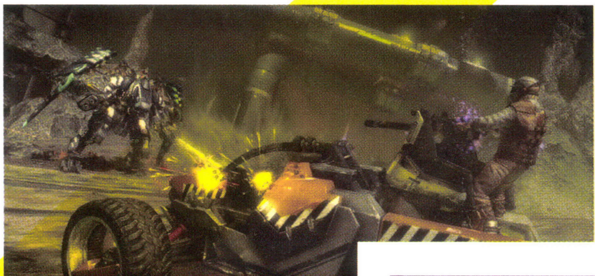
> “I think the press should call shenanigans on any dev who drops a line like this in an interview: 'So what we're trying to do here with Super-Ultra-Tea-Party-Turbo EX-HD is take the first-person, turn-based, MMORPG, Tea and Biscuits simulation genre to the next level!”
>
> ***—Dylan Jobe, LightBox Interactive president***

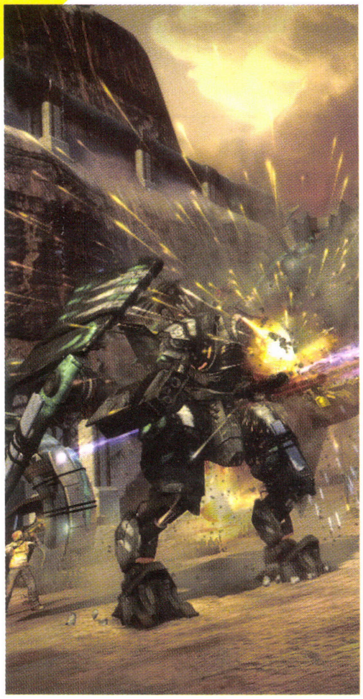
the galaxy's most precious resources: Rift Energy.

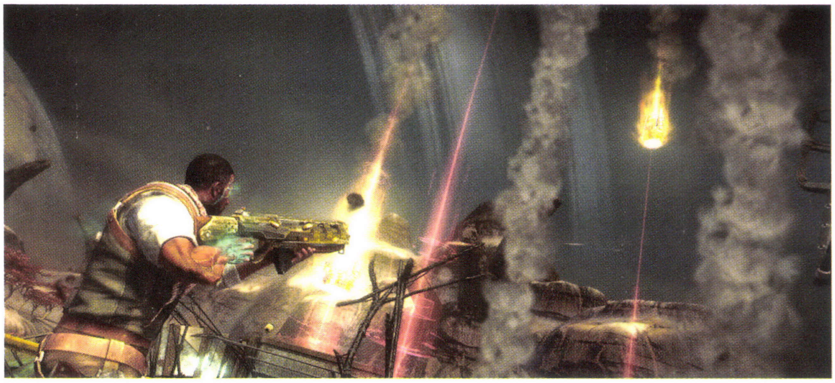
Unfortunately for the inhabitants of Planet Dust—and anyone who mines the substance—Rift Energy possesses some nasty side effects once it contacts human flesh. No one knows this more than the Outcast, a vile race of murderers and vagrants horribly disfigured by the material. Dust, however, isn't just a world of villainy: normal folks and frontiersmen known as Rifters also inhabit the planet.

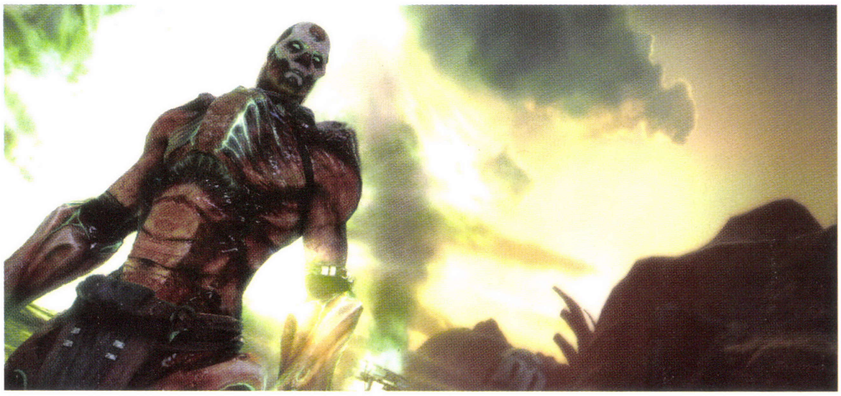
The prawling, richly detailed outdoor settings of *Starhawk* are more reminiscent of Steven King's novel series *The Dark Tower* or Richard Stanley's film *Hardware* than what's traditionally associated with sci-fi. The creative team behind *Starhawk* is putting a lot of energy into the look and feel of their fictional world, but you play a part in shaping the environment they have created. The Build and Battle feature empowers you to quickly construct a variety of objects, including full-blown buildings.

Sony promises us that *Starhawk*'s "full-fledged single-player story" won't disappoint, either. They're even suggesting it's going to redefine the genre. We'll see if *Starhawk* lives up to its enormous potential (and hype) once it come out next year.



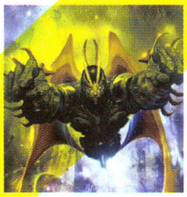






OTHER STUFF NAMED "STARHAWK"...

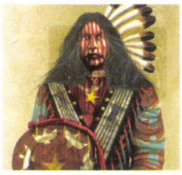
...Starhawk's also the name of a well-known female writer, anarchist, and ecofeminist (born Miriam Simos). She lives in San Francisco and travels around the world giving lectures on a variety of topics, such as the environment and witchcraft.



...A ridiculous-looking Marvel Comics antihero also goes by the name "Starhawk," though his full name is Stakar of the House of Ogord. His super power is...to endlessly relive his life over and over again, which he makes the best of, similarly to Bill Murray's character in *Groundhog Day*.

STARHAWK
3-D ACTION
3-D REALISM
3-D PROFITS
DIMENSIONS:

...A completely different video game made in 1977. This one's a blatant ripoff of *Star Wars*, specifically the famous scene where Luke and fellow X-wing pilots fly through the Death Star's trenches in *Episode IV*. The arcade cabinet was designed in such an efficient fashion that arcade owners had to physically place a cinder block inside the machine to prevent it from tipping over and crushing the player beneath it.

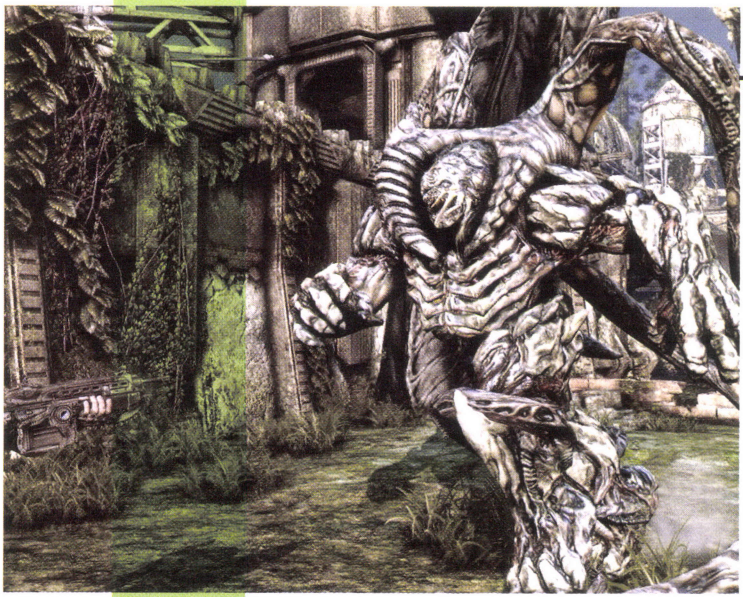


...A painting of a creepy Native American warrior by Oklahoman artist JD Challenger.

MASS EFFECT 3: EARTH

Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC Release date: 2012

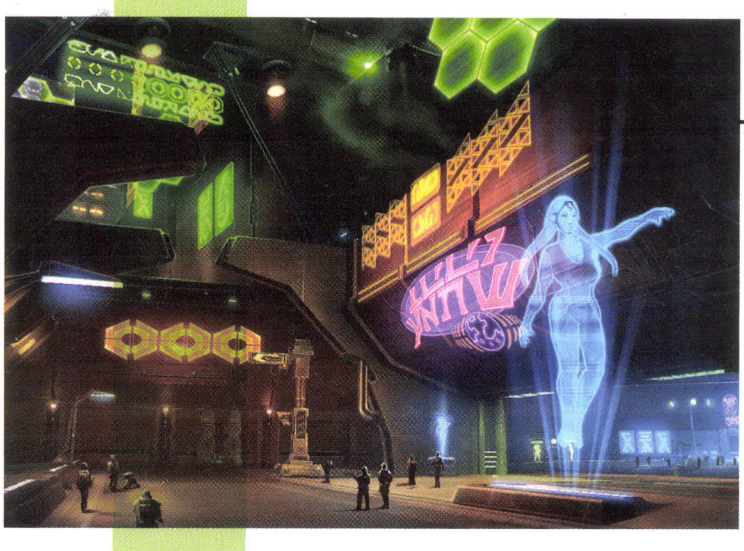
Earth might not sound like the most exotic backdrop for a sci-fi game—especially in a franchise filled with so many fascinating fictional worlds like *Mass Effect*—but our home turf actually plays a significant role the new game. In *Mass Effect 3* it's up to Commander Shepard to save Earth from a homicidal race of machines consumed with the extinction of humanity. Thankfully, Shepard won't have to save our planet single-handedly, as he'll call on some help from the allies he's formed along his epic journey.



GEARS OF WAR: SERA

Platforms: Xbox 360, PC
Release date: September 20, 2011

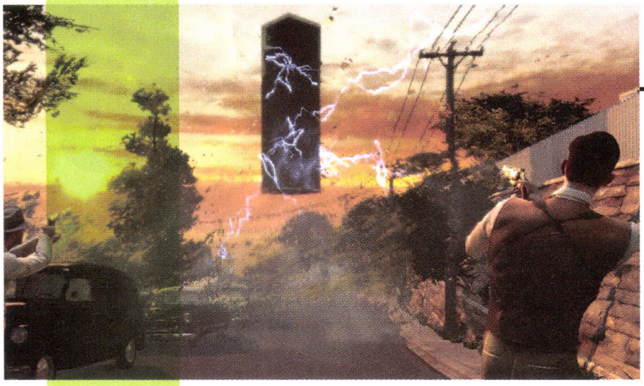
It's summer time in Sera, which means that Marcus, Dom, and the boys—and Delta Squad's fresh female faces, Anya and Sam—are sporting less armor plating in order to be "cooler and more mobile," according to Art Director Chris Perna. But warm weather isn't the only thing significant about *Gears 3*'s setting...the luminescent ooze used to power Sera's cities has mutated the Locust Horde, transforming them into an even nastier new nemesis: the Lambent Locust, which includes creatures that can extend and grow their appendages at will, like The Fantastic Four's Mr. Fantastic (the Drudge), and giant plant-like beasts (Stalkers) that spew out other smaller critters. Ewie.



STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC: VAST UNIVERSE

Platforms: PC
Release date: 2011

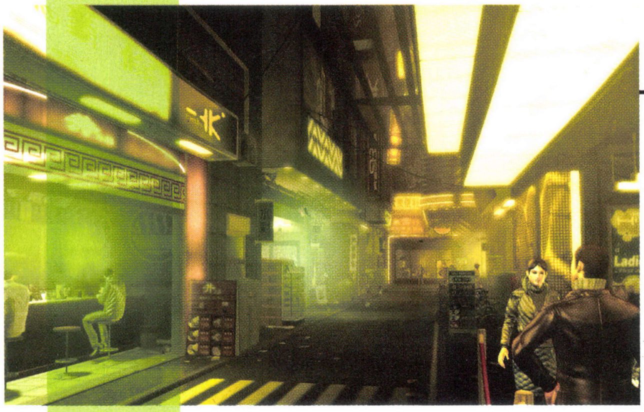
Star Wars fans can visit a plethora of planets, new and familiar, from the sci-fi series' expansive universe in BioWare's anticipated MMO. *Star Wars: The Old Republic* includes planets you might not know much about—like the Sith Empire capital, Dromund Kaas, and the toxic wasteland Quesh—as well as planets you'll likely remember from the classic *Star Wars* film trilogy like Hoth, Tatooine, and Alderaan. But that's not even scratching the surface—the game boasts many other planets, some of which haven't even been revealed yet.



XCOM:
ATOMIC AGE AMERICA

Platforms: Xbox 360, PC Release date: 2012

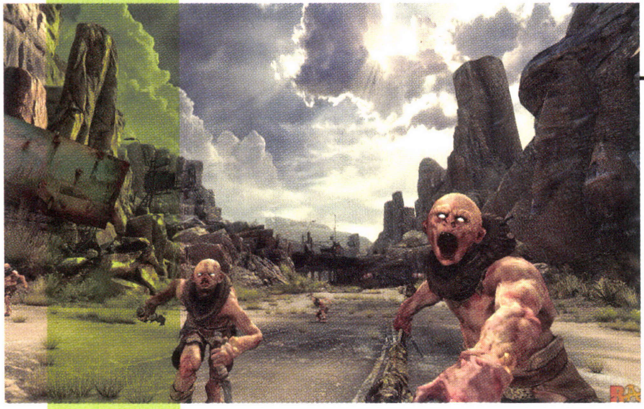
2K Marin's forthcoming *XCOM* plops players in the United States during the Atomic Age of the 1950s, a time when the nation strongly believed that nuclear energy (and defense) would radically transform their lives for the better. Life is good...until a strange malevolent alien lifeform lands in suburbia: a shapeless pitch-black ooze that melts humans like acid on margarine. A variety of oddly shaped hostile UFOs also show up to wreak havoc on America.



DEUS EX:
CYBERPUNK RENAISSANCE

Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC Release date: August 23 2011

Set in the year 2027, the *Deus Ex* prequel envisions the future as a place where biomechanical augmentations on humans are perfectly normal. Consider it the ultimate form of plastic surgery. The game takes place in major cities scattered around the globe, such as Shanghai, Montreal, and Detroit—but don't expect these places to look anything like they do now. *Human Revolution* features a singular vision of the world that blends elements of historic eras, like the Renaissance, with the series' trademark cyberpunk vibe.



RAGE:
POSTAPOCALYPTIC EARTH

Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC
Release date: September 13, 2011

Post-apocalyptic settings in video games are as common as Princess Leias at Comic Con, but id Software (creators of *Doom* and *Quake*) stress that this isn't just another generic wasteland. In *Rage,* an asteroid "the size of Manhattan" slams into planet Earth with the force of 1 million tons of TNT. Luckily, the Ark project preserved a select number of humans below the surface. Unluckily, they've been preserved with a substance that has unknown side effects.

PAT ON LESSER-KNOWN SCI-FI...

I dig *Star Wars* and *Mass Effect* as much as the next guy...but there's a buttload of sweet sci-fi—both in movies and games—that's not championed nearly enough. Since this feature highlights the next incarnation of *BioShock*, I thought it'd be appropriate to recommend *System Shock*, the spiritual precursor to the franchise, which is more steeped in traditional sci-fi themes and imagery as it takes place on a massive space station and involves a malevolent artificial intelligence. The game still holds up remarkably well today. And if you're in the mood for an underrated sci-fi masterpiece, I highly recommend Ken Russell's *Altered States*, a film about a team of researchers examining the effects of combining psychoactive drugs with sensory deprivation via an isolation tank in an effort to access the other 90 percent of our brains that we don't use (which apparently contains some scary stuff left over from our prehistoric man days).

The Next-Gen Handhelds You

What started with Apple—and its one-two-three punch of iPhone, iPod Touch, and iPad—has rocked the video-game industry to its foundation. The game is, literally, changing, thanks to an onslaught of powerful Android smartphones and tablets. And while these new devices are first competing directly against Apple's dynasty, the next stage in the battle will include traditional console makers: Sony, Nintendo, and Microsoft.

SMARTPHONES & TABLETS

Designed for Gaming

New smartphones and tablets are flooding the market, and they offer all kinds of functionality, including autostereoscopic 3D gaming. Here's a look at some choice options.

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LG Thrill 4G

AT&T (Summer 2011)

The Nintendo 3DS has competition in the mobile space for the first time. Running the first dual-core, dual-channel 1 GHz processor in the U.S. and based on the Android 2.2 platform, the LG Thrill 4G is great for gaming. In addition to apps and games from Android Market, LG Thrill 4G will offer 3D content via the LG 3D Space, which houses 3D games, video clips, and images for quick, convenient access.

HTC EVO 3D

Sprint (Summer 2011)

The HTC EVO 3D is powered by a 1.2 GHz Qualcomm Snapdragon dual-core processor and is built on Android 2.3, Gingerbread. The 3D phone features dual 5-megapixel cameras, which can be used to capture both high-quality conventional and stunning 3D images and videos that can be easily shared with friends. HDMI connectivity allows for both 3D and 2D gaming and entertainment on a big screen.

Gaming Haven't Played

Words by
John Gaudiosi

You may be thinking that you've already heard about mobile phones taking over the world in the past (remember Nokia's bulky N-Gage game phone?). Things are different now that the technology powering these new smartphones comes from companies like Google, Nvidia, and Intel. And the consumer electronics companies getting involved in the tablet space could fill up the Consumer Electronics Show. In fact, they did, as major players like Dell, Sony, Acer, HP, Motorola, LG, Samsung, and Vizio are all in the mobile-games business now.

> "Mobile games are, along with social games, the hottest sector of the video-game industry by far."
>
> —Dennis Ryan, PopCap's executive vice president of worldwide publishing

CONSOLE GAMES IN YOUR POCKET

While sales of the Nintendo 3DS (and the Nintendo DS) are still strong, the PSP Go has gone the way of Toshiba's HD-DVD. Sony's successor to the PSP is coming this fall, but even with that device, Sony has expanded its PlayStation Suite of games for PS1 and PS2 to play on Android phones. The new Sony Ericcson Xperia Play phone is the first of many PlayStation-certified smartphones that will allow you to play classic games like *Crash Bandicoot* and *MediEvil* on-the-go.

The key differentiator in the future of mobile games is the sheer size of the market. As well as Sony, Microsoft, and Nintendo have sold consoles, their sales are *nothing* compared to the number of people who own a mobile phone. And with the low entry-point for new smartphones (even the iPhone 3GS is $50), the user base for Android and iOS devices is set to explode in the coming years. According to research firm Parks Associates, the potential audience of smartphone users could top 1 billion by 2014.

Sony Ericsson
XPERIA

Sony Ericsson Xperia Play

Verizon Wireless (Out Now)

Sony Computer Entertainment's other sister company, Sony Ericsson, has finally launched its PlayStation Phone. The Xperia Play Android device has a slide-out gaming pad that allows players to jump into PlayStation Suite games as well as a library of over 60 launch games. Developers are creating original games to tap into the power of Qualcomm's optimized Snapdragon processor with a 1Ghz CPU and embedded Adreno GPU graphics processor. **Price: $199**

MOTOROLA
verizon

HTC Droid Incredible 2

Verizon Wireless (Out Now)

Verizon Wireless has made its Droid lineup of phones perfect for gaming. The spec highlights for the HTC Droid Incredible 2 are impressive, if not incredible. The Android phone is powered by a second generation 1 GHz Qualcomm processor. Games look great on the 800x480 pixel 4-inch capacitive display. And all of the Android phones play a full array of games, including Flash-based games, which means you can keep up with Facebook gaming on the go. **Price: $199**

RAY'S TAKE

Sony's PlayStation Suite sounded like a good idea for a central smartphone gaming platform, but right now it's a desert; I really wonder why they'd launch it so soon. A few PS1 games aren't going to be what sends Android gaming forward, no matter how classic they are—and not being able to link a PSN account to download what you may have bought before really stinks. Beating Apple is a matter of quality, not speed. Meanwhile, Xbox Live on Windows Phone now has several XBLA transplants.

THE HOTTEST SECTOR

"Mobile games are, along with social games, the hottest sector of the video-game industry by far," states Dennis Ryan, the executive vice president of worldwide publishing at PopCap, which derives nearly a third of its revenue from sales of mobile games like *Bejeweled* and *Plants vs. Zombies*. "As more people purchase smartphones and the entire process of finding, purchasing, and playing mobile games becomes as simple as browsing the Internet, the mobile-games market is going to accelerate even more."

A recent survey conducted by Information Solutions Group for PopCap Games found some interesting statistics. When asked which gaming-capable device they play games most often on, 44 percent chose their phones, catapulting past video-game consoles (21 percent) and computers (30 percent) to the top of the list. This compares to just 17 percent of mobile gamers who chose their handset as their most frequently used gaming device in a similar survey conducted in 2009.

SURPASSING CONSOLES (& PC)

Newer smartphones entering the marketplace, like the LG Optimus 2X, feature dual-core processing from Nvidia. This Tegra 2 technology puts the power of a PC from just a few years ago in your hand. It's also in new tablets like Sony's S1 and S2 and Motorola's Xoom.

According to Matt Wuebbling, director of product marketing for Tegra, this technology will advance handheld gaming for a couple of reasons. From a hardware perspective, Tegra is fast and powerful: *Galaxy on Fire 2* delivers four times the number of polygons than the iPhone version of the game, and OpenGL shaders allow it to run at a very high resolution with silky-smooth gameplay.

AN EPIC ENDORSEMENT

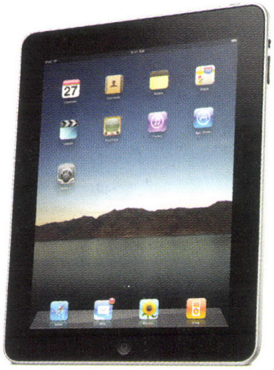
Dr. Mike Capps, the president of Epic Games, spends most of his life around a phone because all his data is there, and now his games are there, as well. Unreal Engine 3 supports both Tegra technology as well as Apple's iOS.

"I'm always going to love triple-A gaming experiences on a massive TV screen—hopefully in 3D—but I'm going to need this phone, and we want to be there with our games, too," Capps says. "I love the fact that I've got a high-horsepower console sitting in my pocket right now. And it's catching up, and it's going to go pass our current-gen consoles pretty soon. So now it's a question of, 'What

Motorola Xoom

Verizon Wireless (Out Now)

Running on Google's Android 3.0 Honeycomb, Xoom was built for speed with Nvidia's Tegra 2 dual-core processor. Xoom delivers console-like gaming performance on its 1280x800, 10.1 inch widescreen display, and it features a built-in gyroscope, barometer, e-compass, accelerometer, and adaptive lighting for new types of applications. It also supports Flash games (something Apple does not) for those Zynga fans out there. It can be plugged into any HDTV for big-screen entertainment. **Price: $599 to $799**



Apple iPad 2

Verizon Wireless and AT&T (Out Now)

Apple has matched Nvidia's Tegra 2 power with this sleeker, lighter sequel, which retains the same dazzling 9.7-inch LED-backlit LCD screen for gaming. The iPad 2 features Apple's new dual-core A5 processor for blazing fast performance, stunning graphics, and two cameras. Expect games to take advantage of the cameras, just as they have for the accelerometer and touchscreen. The iPad 2 also has HDMI support for gaming on a big-screen HDTV. **Price: $499 to $829** do you do with all that power?' We can really express what we want to as artists—whether it's animating faces or having five characters onscreen at once."

And that's just on the small screen. The influx of powerful tablets are further eliminating the need for a console. The HDMI input on the iPad 2 and the new Android tablets like the Acer Iconia Tab A500 allow you to plug your tablet directly into your HDTV (or 3DTV, if you own one). New games in development allow players to use the tablet as a controller and the TV as the screen. If you don't own a tablet already, the odds are you'll be getting one soon. By the end of this year, International Data Corporation forecasts that there could be 50 million tablets in homes around the world.

MERGING PLATFORMS

Another line that's blurring is what platform a game actually exists on. Tegra 2 games like Trendy Entertainment's *Dungeon Defenders: First Strike* can be played on PC, PS3, or a Tegra 2 tablet or smartphone. Jeremy Stieglitz, development director at Trendy, explains that the four-player tower-defense strategy game is stored on the company's servers.

OLIVIA'S TAKE

I'm so behind the times, I'm drinking Crystal Pepsi. Believe you me, I want all the gaming devices I can get my hands on, as well as all the time in the world to play them, but my budget and my busy schedule hold me back. It's an exciting time for the mobile market, but on the flip side, all the options make my head spin and my wallet quiver. I like having one reliable portable console for my commuter gaming needs. It used to be my purple GameBoy that lived in my pocket, now it's my 8GB iPod Touch. Do I switch to an Android? Do I wait till September to get the new iPhone? Should I invest in a tablet? The sprawling growth of the mobile market has me reeling.

"Players are able to actually jump from platform to platform without having to restart from scratch," Stieglitz says. "Not only can you take your character on every platform, but you can actually play online cross-platform games together, against, or with players on PS3, PC, and any Tegra 2 mobile device. The experience will be identical across all of these platforms."

The future of mobile games is coming this fall. In addition to Sony's NGP launch, Nvidia's partners plan to launch the first Tegra 3 devices into the marketplace. Nvidia has debuted Tegra 3 running War Drum Studios' *History—Great Battles Medieval* strategy game in 720p with 650 enemy soldiers engaging in virtual combat.

So while gamers prepare for the launch of the Wii's successor and ponder the next Xbox and PlayStation consoles, the future of games is shaping up to be a very different experience. Today's tablets and smartphones are just the beginning. We're already seeing autostereoscopic phones from LG and HTC (see sidebar) that compete with the Nintendo 3DS. Glasses-free 3D tablets are just around the corner. And the futures of on-the-go—and at-home—gaming are already beginning to merge. G

Sony S1 and S2

(Fall 2011)

While Sony Computer Entertainment will continue its portable gaming push with the NGP, it'll be joined by Sony Electronics' Android tablets: the (codenamed) S1 and S2. With Tegra 2 under the hood, these devices are the first to include the PlayStation Suite, which allows gamers to play PS1 games on either the S1's 9.4-inch touchscreen or the S2's two 5.5-inch displays. Given what Nintendo has done with its DS, the S2's dual screens open up interesting gaming possibilities.

Samsung Galaxy Tab 10.1

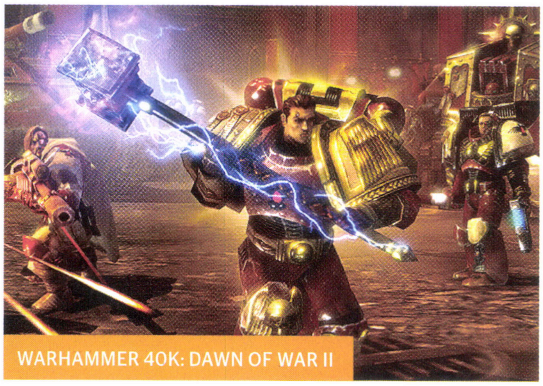
(Out Now)

Samsung was one of the first to compete directly against Apple's iPad last year with its small but sporty Galaxy Tab. The new Galaxy Tab 10.1 is powered by a 1 GHz dual-core Tegra 2 processor from Nvidia and features a 10.1-inch, 1280x800 (WXGA) TFT capacitive display and an 8 megapixel rear camera with LED flash. HDMI support allows for big-screen gaming or movie viewing. And despite all that's under the hood, it's extremely light and portable.

Price: $499 to $599

NOW PLAYING

FIND OUT WHAT THE GAMEPROS ARE PLAYING. AND WHAT THEY'RE NOT.



WARHAMMER 40K: DAWN OF WAR II

L.A. NOIRE

HYPERLIGHT

WHO'S THAT FLYING?

THE WITCHER 2

BRINK

We often get asked, "What happened to the reviews?" And, are these the reviews? And even sometimes, but rarely, what are reviews? No, these are not the reviews. They don't have scores, for instance. They not even our official stance. For both of those, check us out online at GamePro.com. The next few pages are filled with our feelings about the games we're playing: those we love, those that let us down, and those that got worse or better. This is what we're playing and what we think about it right now.

79 Alice: Madness Returns (PS3)
81 Brink (X360)
81 Call of the Dead (X360)
89 Chimera XLC (Hardware)
87 Civilization V (PC)
83 Conduit 2 (Wii)
87 Deus Ex (PC)
79 Dirt 3 (PS3)
89 Digital Storm Dreadnought (Hardware)
83 Dream Trigger 3D (3DS)
88 Dungeon Crawl: Stone Soup (PC)
86 Fable III (PC)
79 Final Fantasy IV: The Complete Collection (PS3)
87 GIRP (PC)
85 Hyperlight (iOS)
82 Ignition Factor (Virtual Console)
84 iOOTP 11 Baseball (iOS)
80 L.A. Noire (X360)
81 Lego: Pirates of the Caribbean (X360)
78 Mortal Kombat (PS3)
85 Moxie (iOS)
89 Nvidia's 3D Vision (Hardware)
80 Outland (XBLA)
84 Pulse (iOS)
82 Radiant Historia (DS)
78 Sengoku Basara: Samurai Heroes (PS3)
87 Star Wars: TIE Fighter (PC)
84 Superbrothers: Sword and Sworcery (iOS)
82 The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time (3DS)
86 The Witcher 2 (PC)
83 Thor: God of Thunder (DS)
78 Virtua Tennis 4 (PS3)
88 Warhammer 40K: Dawn of War II (PC)
85 Who's That Flying? (iOS)
88 World of Tanks (PC)
81 Xbox 360 Triple Pack (XBLA)

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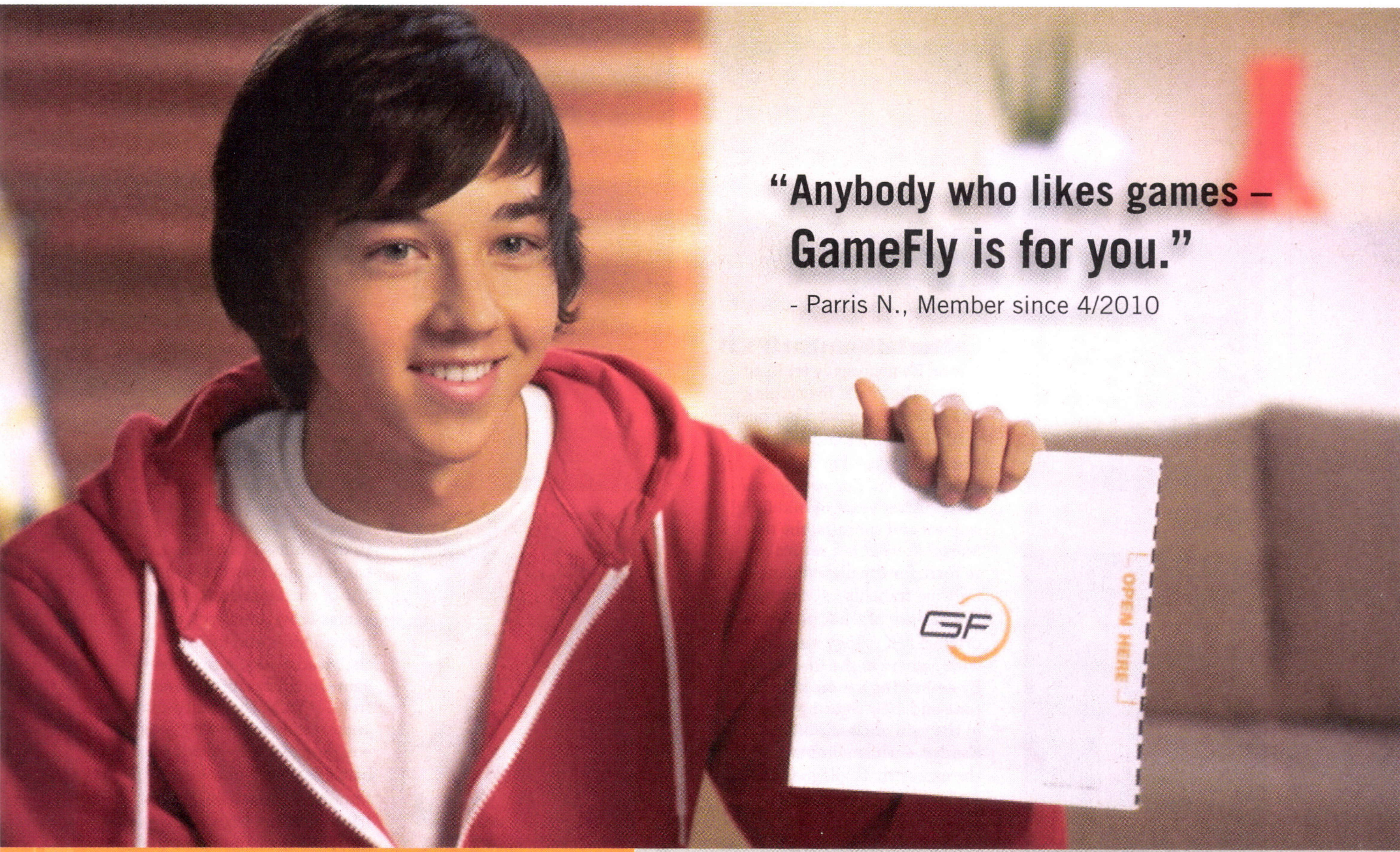
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State of the System: Sony

UPCOMING GAMES

1. Max Payne 3
2. Uncharted 3
3. Journey (PSN)
4. Ratchet & Clank: All 4 One
5. Dead Island

BEST-SELLING

1. Mortal Kombat (PS3)
2. Portal 2 (PS3)
3. SOCOM 4: U.S. Navy SEALs (PS3)
4. Killzone 3 (PS3)
5. MotorStorm: Apocalypse (PS3)

**According to VGChartz.com.*

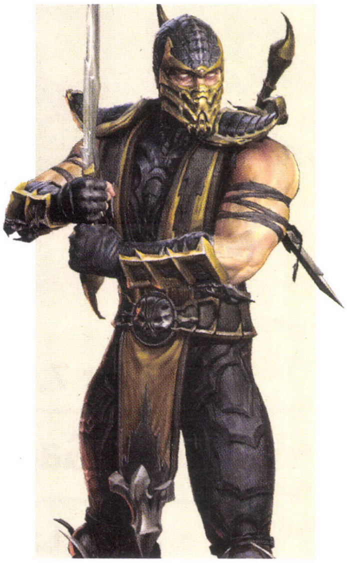
Overheard on Twitter

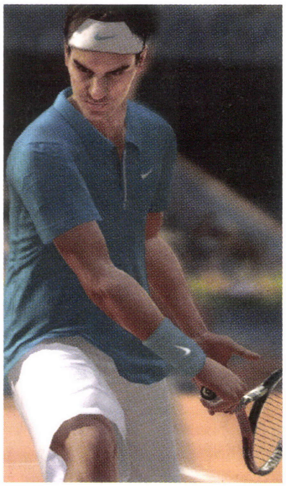
@IGLevine (Ken Levine): Fun Levine fact: I am the body double for Phil Hartman in [the Greedy] movie poster. No joke

What's Kept Us Playing

Mortal Kombat (PS3)

Mortal Kombat really let itself go over the years. Everything after *Mortal Kombat 3* has been mediocre at best and absolute trash at worst—I'm looking at you, *Mortal Kombat: Special Forces*. After years of middling sequels and spinoffs, the new *Mortal Kombat* is a return to form for the ultraviolent fighting franchise. It captures the essence of what made the original *MK* trilogy resonate with gamers in the first place. By embracing a more sinister tone and a 2D fighting system in the vein of classic *Mortal Kombat*—while eliminating all the excess that's plagued the series for so long—NetherRealm has successfully resurrected the series. The Xbox 360 version's essentially as good, but *Mortal Kombat* on PS3 is a smidge cooler, as it features Kratos as a playable combatant. *—Patrick Shaw*





Virtua Tennis 4 (PS3)

I used to play competitive tennis in high school, so I know the difference between a cross-court backhand and an inside-out forehand. There is, sadly, a dearth of good tennis simulators out there, and that's why *Virtua Tennis 4* is right up my doubles alley. It's a fun, more nuanced motion-controlled game than the *Wii Sports* tennis game—the last motion-based sports sim I played. But that's the problem—everyone in the office doesn't care about the realism and would just prefer to stick to the simple bobble-headed Mii characters. So Sega, instead of getting acclaim for creating a great party game, you get my humble appreciation for letting me hit cross-court forehands and topspin backhands in my fanatical solitude. You might not move a lot of units, but you made this old tennis hand happy. *—Chris Holt*

What's Still Comforting

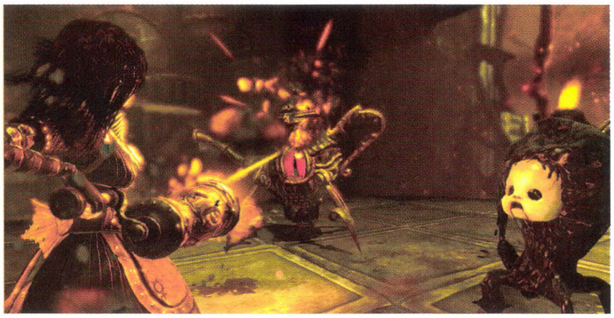
Sengoku Basara: Samurai Heroes (PS3)

I'm kind of partial to Koei's "Warriors" series, but Capcom's *Sengoku Basara* gave the formula a kick in the pants, and I quickly fell in love (I still have room for both in my heart, though). I recently returned to the game since its release last fall, and now I realize it's one of the more comforting games I can come back to. It's nice and fast and focuses on the arcadey action that Koei's games slightly shifted away from. It's also flush with color and exciting music that gets you pumped to head out on the battlefield and mow down a few (hundred) nameless samurai. It's something I can sit back and play on one of summer's cooler evenings and not feel like I wasted my time. *—Ray Barnholt*

What's Been A Long Time Coming

Alice: Madness Returns (PS3)

It's been a good year since I traveled to the distant shores of Shanghai to write up our September 2010 cover story on *Alice: Madness Returns*, and it's a pretty surreal experience to sit down with a complete copy of Spicy Horse's darkly fantastical/fantastically dark follow-up to 2000's *American McGee's Alice*. *Madness Returns* takes its predecessor's macabre Wonderland and greatly fleshes it out, offering twisted new riffs on Lewis Carroll's classic children's novels, as well as some slick new elements that expand on the original *Alice*'s combat-centric gameplay. Troubled young Alice Liddell may drive its narrative, but the twisted world of Wonderland is the real star. And while the hack-n-slash combat is still the game's driving force, puzzles and platforming sequences are welcome reprieves from the harrowed heroine's many enemy encounters. —*Will Herring*



What We're Struggling With

LANCIA ITALIA

Dirt 3 (PS3)

When I was a kid, the only practice I ever got driving was with video games. In fact, I trained for my driver's test by playing *Initial D* and *Gran Turismo*. While I'm not the most hardcore racing fan, I like getting behind that wheel. But with *Dirt 3*, I'm crashing my ride and pulling donuts around the track in every rally race. Sure, the graphics look better than ever, and the driver's box camera is pretty sweet, but this off-road stuff is giving me a real headache. Without the safety of nice, high track walls to bounce off of, I actually have to learn—*gulp*—how to drive like a sane person. Back to the training, I guess.... —*McKinley Noble*

Final Fantasy IV: The Complete Collection (PSP)

I tried hard, very hard, to get into this. This the cherished classic is one of the best games in the *Final Fantasy* series. It's a turn-based RPG. I love those things! I should be digging it. And yet, I've set my PSP aside for something else. Every time I pull out a handheld from my bag, I find that I bypass my PSP and pick up either my 3DS or—*gasp*!—a book. I'm at the point where I just got the *Enterprise*—the game's story is just picking up. Yet I just can't get into it. And this makes me wonder—am I just not getting into this game, or am I tiring of the traditional Japanese RPG? —*Jason Wilson*

State of the System: Microsoft

UPCOMING GAMES

1. Gears of War 3
2. Serious Sam: Double D
3. Shadow Complex 2
4. Dead Island
5. Deus Ex: Human Revolution

BEST-SELLING

1. Portal 2
2. Mortal Kombat
3. Kinect Adventures!
4. Call of Duty: Black Ops
5. Halo: Reach

According to VGChartz.com

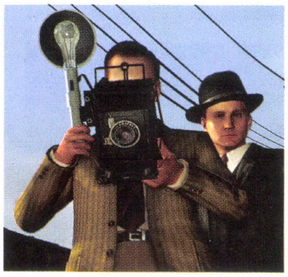
Overheard on Twitter

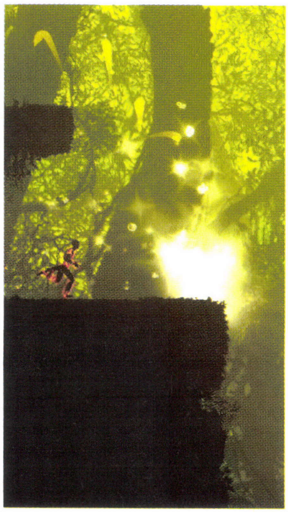
@jimmycarr: Albert Einstein said: A table, a chair, a bowl of fruit and a violin; what else does a man need to be happy? I dunno, an Xbox 360?

What's Kept Us Playing

L.A. Noire (X360)

I'm a detective-fiction nut. I read the pulpy paperback novels, I watch fedora-clad actors chew scenery and smoke sulkingly in film noirs, and I regularly monologue to myself during day-to-day errands—just to make myself seem a bit more hardboiled. So it's no surprise that I've been anticipating Rockstar's and Team Bondi's gritty slice of Los Angeles, circa 1947, for quite some time. One part *Grand Theft Auto* open-worlder, one part Tex Murphy point-and-clicker, and one part Phoenix Wright crime-scene-investigator, *L.A. Noire* is a bold and exciting step for the adventure-game genre—and a step that many Rockstar lifers may not have been expecting. Its photorealistic jazz- and gin-soaked streets are some of the richest I've explored in recent memory, and its episodic campaign kept me entertained and eager to revisit Detective Cole Phelps' one-man war on demons of both the criminal and personal variety. —*Will Herring*





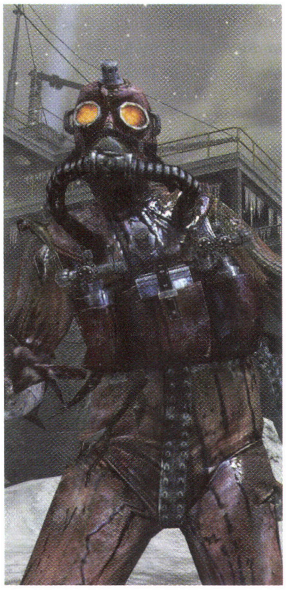
Outland (XBLA)

Outland, published by Ubisoft and created by the developer behind *Super Stardust*, has no reason to be as under-the-radar as it has been. But somehow, its quiet release earlier this year made it slip unnoticed between the cracks of the spring's big releases. I completely forgot the game even existed until after it came out. On paper, it sounds like an unlikely, unworkable mix of disparate genres, but in practice, this *Ikaruga*-meets-*Metroid* mashup is like chocolate and peanut butter. The gameplay blends familiar mechanics in unfamiliar ways and packages it with unique, pleasing visuals. Now, if only the title wasn't so generic and nondescriptive, it would've popped up on more gamers' radar. —*Justin Haywald*

What's A Horror Fan's Dream Come True

Call of the Dead (X360)

The latest Zombies DLC for *Call of Duty: Black Ops* (which is part of the larger Escalation map pack) is a must-play for horror buffs for a number of reasons. The most awesome are the inclusion of horror icons Danny Trejo (*From Dusk Till Dawn*, *Machete*), Robert Englund (*A Nightmare on Elm Street* series), Sarah Michelle Gellar (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*), Michael Rooker (*The Walking Dead*), and an undead George A. Romero (*Night of the Living Dead* series). On top of *Call of the Dead*'s killer lineup of stars, the download boasts the biggest Zombies map released thus far, an arctic hell filled with plenty of strategic locations to defend and drive back those flesh-eating hordes. Just don't shoot Romero—he's invincible and has a nasty temper.—*Patrick Shaw*



What Let Us Down

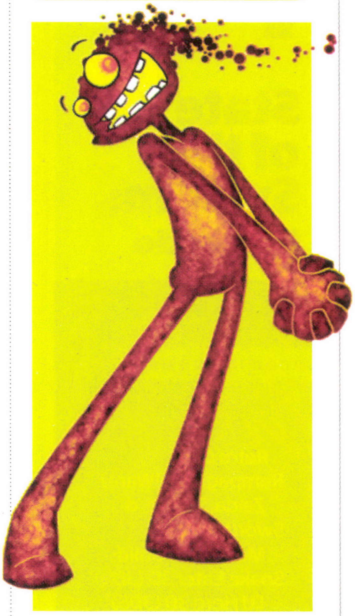
Lego Pirates of the Caribbean (X360)

When you enjoy a franchise as much as I do, you'll stick out even the flawed entries. But coming after the excellent *Lego Harry Potter* and *Lego Star Wars III*, *Lego Pirates of the Caribbean* is undeniably disappointing. It's not the formula exactly. Watching *Lego* characters mime their way through classic movie franchises while searching for collectibles is as enjoyable as ever. It's more that the levels feel cramped, the stories are confusing, and the dueling mechanic means getting trapped in unwanted frames of animation. Even the trademark humor falls a bit flat. *Lego Pirates* is still a good time, if only because of the strong source material. Compared to the rest of the series, though, it's a step back. —*Kat Bailey*

Brink (X360)

I was superexcited about *Brink*; I am usually pumped for games that seem to break the mold while still fitting firmly into their genre. The clever gameplay choices, like branching objectives, plus the truly stylish character and art design suggested that this would be the kind of game that would suck me in completely. But here's the problem: *Brink* isn't all that fun. Shooting enemies isn't very satisfying, and the level layouts make for impenetrable choke points at times, turning the action tedious after time. I'm still hoping the game improves with some tweaks through updates, but for now I'm going to have to go back to *Team Fortress 2* for my class-based multiplayer shooter action. —*Tom Price*

Bang for Your Buck



Xbox 360 Triple Pack (X360)

Video-game compilations are a nice way to save some cash, especially considering new games cost as much as $60 a pop. But these collections often come with older games that just aren't as exciting as when they originally released. The Xbox 360 Triple Pack, however, comes with three great XBLA exclusives still very much worth playing: the atmospheric black-and-white puzzle-platformer *Limbo*, the quirky action-platformer *'Splosion Man*, and my favorite, motorcycle puzzle-racing hybrid, *Trials HD*. Not only is this trio of downloadable titles worth its $30 price, each offers something different. If you missed out on these games when they first hit XBLA, you should give some serious consideration to picking this sweet compilation up. —*Patrick Shaw*

State of the System: Nintendo

UPCOMING GAMES

1. Retro City Rampage (WiiWare)
2. Zelda: Skyward Sword (Wii)
3. Metal Gear Solid: Snake Eater 3D (3DS)
4. DJ Hero 3D (3DS)
5. Assassin's Creed: Lost Legacy (3DS)

BEST-SELLING

1. Pokémon Black/White (DS)
2. Just Dance 2 (Wii)
3. Wii Sports (Wii)
4. Zumba Fitness (Wii)
5. Wii Sports Resort (Wii)

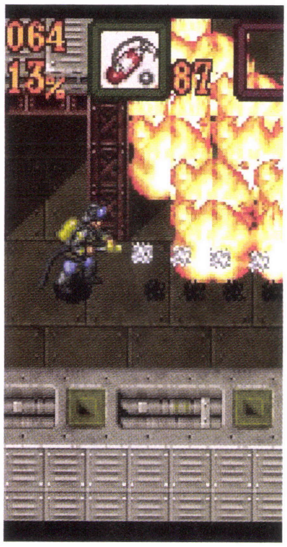
Overheard on Twitter

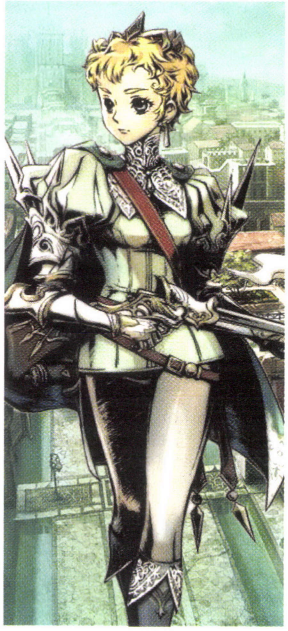
@krisspade: Hotel in Alabama to transform into #Nintendo theme park complete with #cosplay and #8bit living. I wanna go :) http://bit.ly/jh4oJl

What's Kept Us Playing

Ignition Factor (Virtual Console)

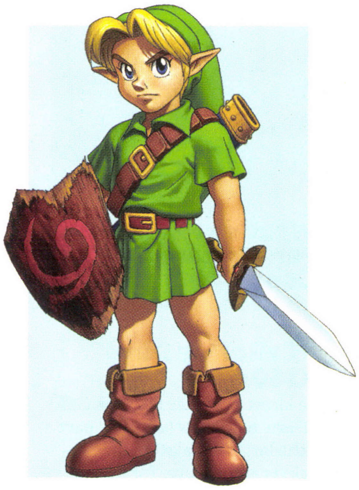
When it comes to firefighting video games, you can count the decent ones on one hand. The pretentiously named *Ignition Factor*, a Super NES game just rereleased on the Wii Virtual Console, is one of the better games where your enemies are raging infernos. In the game you play a firefighter who must enter burning buildings in order to save people (usually shoeless women lying on the ground) trapped inside. Saving lives, however, isn't as simple as spraying flames with your extinguisher. You have a variety of tools (axes, rope, etc.) and extinguishers (regular, electric fire, chemical fire), which are necessary for specific situations. And if a couple of people are burned alive during your rescue attempt, hey, no biggie because the game allows you to make a few mistakes. —*Patrick Shaw*





Radiant Historia (DS)

Time travel isn't my thing. I don't care for it in *Chrono Trigger*, and it annoys the heck out of me in *Star Trek*. So I'm surprised I'm enjoying *Radiant Historia* so much. Developed by Atlus, whom I consider the top publisher of Japanese RPGs over the last few years, *Radiant Historia* lets you travel backward and forward in time to create the "true" timeline. Say you make a decision that ends up going horrible awry—if conditions permit it, you can rewind back to the point you made the fateful decision and correct your error. Combat is fun, too: Enemies appear on a grid, and you can use abilities to push them into each other, setting up combos for your other characters. I'm eager to see where—and when—my decisions take me. —*Jason Wilson*



The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time (3DS)

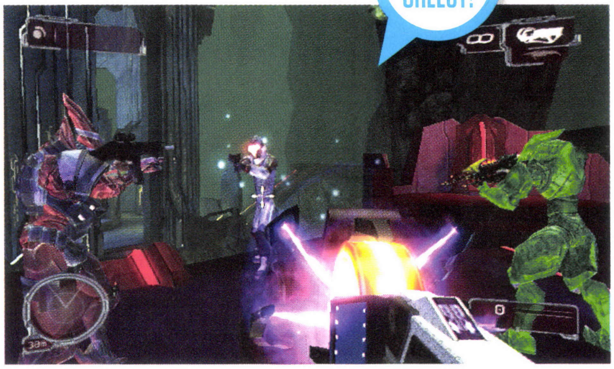
Nintendo gets a lot of flack for dwelling on established franchises, but *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* probably needed the update. There really is a great game there, but it was tough to find it under the muddy textures and occasionally choppy framerate. With that in mind, it's been a real pleasure revisiting *Ocarina of Time* on the 3DS. What really jumps out at me in this playthrough is the sense of scale. Even after all these years, the overworld still feels gigantic, and the dungeons are as expansive as ever. In many ways, it's the most ambitious *Zelda* game ever. With the warts gone, it may have once again emerged as the best in the franchise, which certainly makes it worth another look on the 3DS.—*Kat Bailey*

What We Like But Expected to Hate

Thor: God of Thunder (DS)

Saying that *Thor: God of Thunder* is "OK for a movie tie-in" is like saying Nicolas Cage is a "decent actor." Even though you're giving a positive critique, it's going to come off as a backhanded compliment. Although I gave the *Thor* DS game a 2.5 star rating, it was actually a lot better than I thought it was going to be. Thor's not complicated. Just put him in a game where he smacks monsters around like stuntmen in a Michael Bey film and throw in some flashy superpowers. And WayFoward didn't just throw some programming code in a blender and call it a day. They actually tried. And I applaud that. Now, the Xbox 360 game—I'd rather stick my face in a pile of rusty nails than play that again.—*McKinley Noble*

What's So Cheesy, It's Fun



Conduit 2 (Wii)

When *Conduit 2* arrived on my desk, I wasn't expecting much from High Voltage's shooter sequel. The original isn't exactly the second coming of *Halo*...though it did lay the technical foundation for the developer to build on with new ideas and features in *Conduit 2*. My full review is on GamePro.com, but the TLDR version is that I ended up having a lot of fun with the game. It's certainly no masterpiece—in fact, it's actually kind of a trainwreck—but its absurd sci-fi story-line (think the video-game equivalent of a SyFy Chanel Original Movie) is jam-packed with characters straight out of *Buckaroo Banzai* and cheesy action hero one-liners that'd make Arnie spit out his cigar. And if *Conduit 2*'s hammy tone sounds like it might appeal to you, the game's ending will blow your mind and go down as one of the biggest "WTF just happened" moments in gaming history. Play it till the end if you don't believe me. —*Patrick Shaw*

What's Really Let Us Down

Dream Trigger 3D (3DS)

Zelda makes a nice postlaunch 3DS game to enjoy over the summer, but I'm still waiting for the next new game to get into. I hoped *Dream Trigger* would fill the gap, but it's a shooter that has no idea what it wants to be: It's kind of first-person in that you control a reticule that fires lasers at targeted enemies, but the reticule is also your player character that can get damaged, and enemies need to be revealed by drawing on them before you can shoot them, and...yeah. You might think you'd have to be high to understand how to play it, but I don't know what you'd need to ingest to enjoy it (headaches induced by deep 3D wouldn't help, anyway).
—*Ray Barnholt*

State of the System: Mobile

UPCOMING GAMES

1. Final Fantasy Tactics: War of the Lions
2. Avadon
3. Lords of War
4. High Flyer Death Defyer
5. Jurassic Park: The Game

BEST-SELLING MOBILE

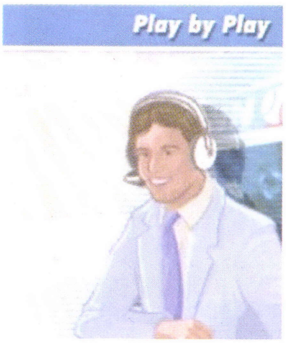
1. Death Rally
2. Angry Birds Rio HD
3. Angry Birds HD
4. Splinter Cell HD
5. Angry Birds Seasons HD

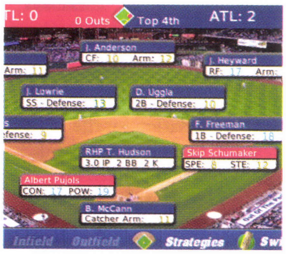
According to iTunes

Overheard on Twitter

@GilliganAU: It's official. #DungeonRaid joins Tetris, #Minecraft & #PlantsvsZombies in the "see it when I close my eyes" category of addictive games.

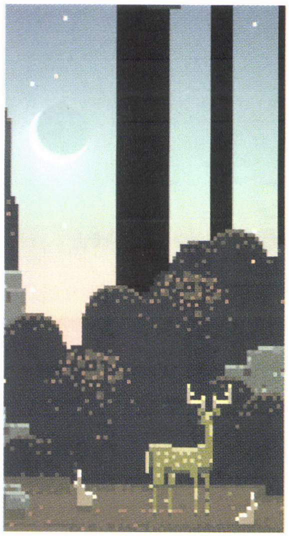
What's Kept Us Playing





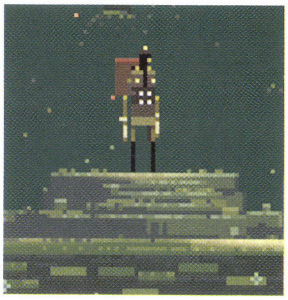
iOOTP 11 Baseball

I'm such a baseball fan that I even enjoy old-school simulators—glorified spreadsheets that track and re-create baseball games in the same way any complex strategy board game does. Fantasy baseball bums me out, but simulators like *iOOTP*—from the makers of one of the most respected long-running sims out there, *Out of the Park*—make me happy, and they aren't too hardcore for the casual baseball fan. These kind of games are for the armchair manager, and *iOOTP* gives you plenty of options for making roster moves and an easy to understand interface for calling the action within your games. Real players and real teams (though not real logos, which is weird) make it much more satisfying, too. —*Tom Price*



Superbrothers: Sword & Sworcery EP

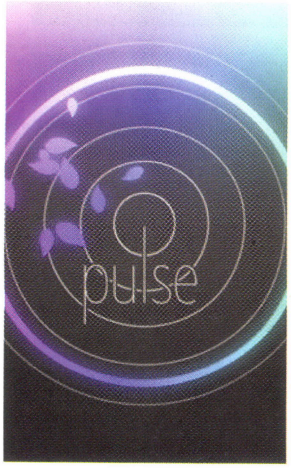
My Twitter feed blew up when *S:S&SEP* came out. The quirky adventure game let's you send snippets of any dialogue that strikes your fancy out across your social media stream, but since I didn't own an iPad, I didn't know what any of the messages were about. But once it hit iPhone, I immediately downloaded the game. Screenshots really don't do justice to the game's distinct visual style, but most impressive is the soundtrack. *S:S&SEP* is not a game to play without headphones. And like any mobile game should be, it's broken up into short, manageable chunks that make picking it up for bus trips, and while waiting for a friend, a breeze. I used to hold iPhone games in disdain, but this recent trend of thoroughly amazing titles is making me reconsider that way of thinking. —*Justin Haywald*



What's Lost Our Interest

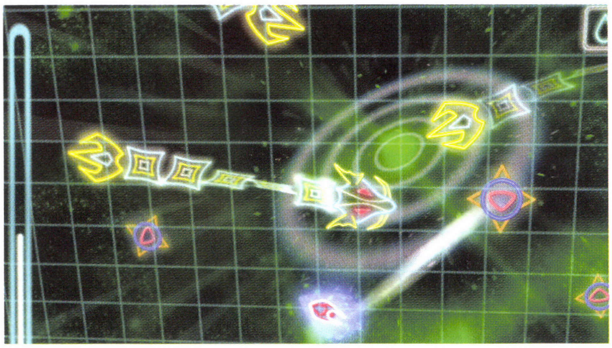
Pulse

Pulse is an interesting-looking iPad music/rhythm game that had garnered a bunch of 5-star reviews on the App Store, so I downloaded it in the hope it would be fun. Instead, I got a reminder that iTunes reviews are as reliable as a rusty, three-wheeled rollerskate. *Pulse* is weak, way too simplistic, and pretty pointless. Conceptually, it sounds good: a cool-looking rhythm game that uses a series of concentric circles that pulse in time to a beat. You must hit moving "notes" orbiting the circles in time to create a tune. As you progress, there are more circles to each track, and more notes to hit, but no multipliers or any real gameplay depth. It therefore gets dull quickly. At the end of the day, it's more of a music-doodle app than a real game. I might sound like a stingy old git whining about getting more for $5, but there are some truly awesome games available for a buck, I expect a higher-priced game to have a lot more going for it. —*Jaz Rignall*



Hyperlight

Hyperlight is the kind of game I usually love. It's a neo-retro iPad arcade game in which you zoom around in your neon-colored vector-graphic spaceship, powering it up to smash into enemies before powering down and becoming vulnerable to enemy attack again. The gameplay is fun, the action fast and furious, and it looks terrific. So what's wrong? Well, it's the controls; they're *rubbish*. Instead of using a virtual joypad-type control, the game uses the iPad's inner gyro and tilt controls to move your ship, and it just doesn't work. There are two control choices—one with the iPad flat, in which case you have to position yourself awkwardly above it; the other is at a 45-degree angle. Neither allows you to judge the speed and angle to perform the precision controls this game requires. The result is a game so hard to control, it's almost unplayable. It's been a long time since I've seen a game get so much right, only to have one thing undo it all. If patched, *Hyperight* could go from an "avoid" to a "must buy." —*Jaz Rignall*



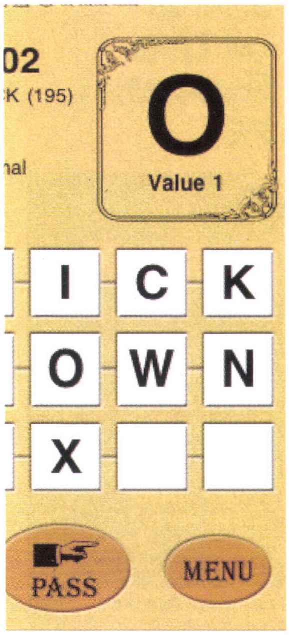
What's a Welcome Distraction

Who's That Flying?!

Hailing from the PSP Minis store—Sony's underfed fling with a downloadable marketplace driven by independent developers—Mediatonic's *Who's That Flying?!* is a charming horizontal side-scrolling shoot-'em-up that's only just recently hit iOS devices. Boasting an eye-catching, comic-booky visual style, witty cut-scene dialogue, and nonstop, fast-and-frantic "shoot everything" gameplay, *Who's That Flying?!* offers some clever takes on tired shoot-'em-up—and tower defense—tropes. It's a fun and easily digestible mobile diversion that's well worth the App Store asking price of $.99, and its on-rails nature makes it a perfect fit for iOS touchscreen devices. —*Will Herring*

A

Best Word Game Since Scrabble



Moxie (iPhone)

Moxie is as simple and low-tech as games get—it's also every bit as fun as many PS3/X360/PC games with mind-bending graphics. The game gives you three rows of blank tiles and 52 randomly selected letters to form words with. It sounds easy, but the game requires strategic placement of tiles as you shoot for special high-scoring "Moxie" words (like "whale") and avoid creating words that don't exist (called "Twaddling"), which subtracts points from your score. My only complaint is that it occasionally wigs out and doesn't load. If you're a word-game junkie like me and you love iOS titles like *Words with Friends*, *Scrabble*, *Scrabble Blast*, *Scramble*, and the like, you should definitely add *Moxie* to your collection. —*Patrick Shaw*

State of the System: PC

UPCOMING GAMES

1. **Deus Ex: Human Revolution**
2. **The Lord of the Rings: War in the North**
3. **Warhammer 40,000: Space Marine**
4. **Dead Island**
5. **Max Payne 3**

BEST-SELLING PC

1. **Call of Duty: Black Ops**
2. **Agricultural Simulator 2011**
3. **Brink**
4. **The Witcher 2**
5. **Duke Nukem Forever**

**According to GamesDownloads.com*

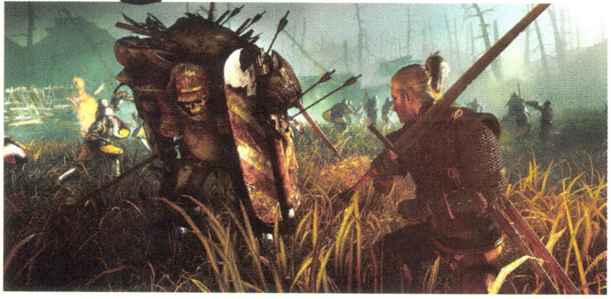
Overheard on Twitter

@EvolveTom: "Pretty damn sad to see the rampant piracy of PC games. Oh, I know it's nothing new. Just sad."

What's Kept Us Playing

The Witcher 2

This isn't a kiddie RPG. *The Witcher 2* is gory, sexy, and most of all—it's bloody hard! The combat's been tweaked (you no longer have three stances for different sorts of combat), which means that the witcher Geralt of Rivia has just two basic attacks: swift and strong. (He's still got magic and potions). You also don't have to time attacks in the same way. CD Projekt Red's tweaking doesn't stop at how you attack—the enemies are much smarter, with opposing warriors more likely to work together to flank you than in the first *Witcher*. One of the early battles exemplifies this: Six warriors are in a courtyard, three of which are your basic grunts, one foe with a shield, a knight in armor, and a heavy knight. While the grunts rush you, the other three attack you together. You just can't run into combat, which makes *The Witcher 2* is very satisfying and is one of the best PC games of 2011. —*Jason Wilson*



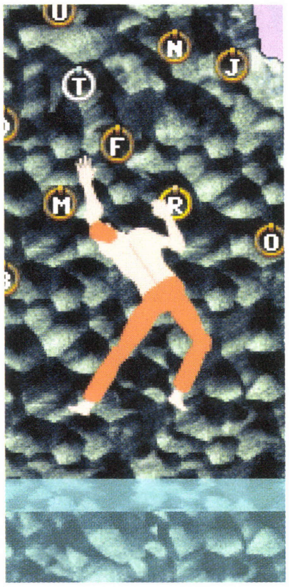
Fable 3

Fable 3 is about overthrowing an evil tyrant through violent revolution. But while toppling an authoritarian regime is a familiar narrative in games, *Fable 3* kept me interested because of what happens next. OK, so you've led the revolution. Now what? What kind of ruler will you be? How will you satisfy your people and those that helped you initiate the revolution? This has got me thinking. What kind of ruler will Mario make after knocking over King Koopa? What about Princess Zelda or Link after Ganondorf is defeated? I guess I'm now looking at what kind of social policies a Hyrulean would institute versus the budget proposed by a plumber from Brookyln. Sure, they're both great fighters, but are these really the kind of people we want to be ruling a country? Or, to quote Monty Python, "Lying in ponds and distributing swords is no basis for a system of government."—*Chris Holt*

Civilization V

Ah, *Civ V*. Last month, I finally gave in and admitted that you own me. This month isn't much different. When I sit at my gaming rig at home, if I don't have a game in mind to play, I find myself playing *Civ*. For the next two or three hours. The most recent patch fixed a number of bugs, and I've noticed that the game runs smoother than before. The A.I.? Well, while improved, I've noticed it still does some dumb things—such as not massing barbarian units in the face of an attack by my forces against their camp. The game still has some rough patches, but I'm still having so much fun with it that I can continue to ignore the problems—and enjoy it even more as it's patched.
—*Jason Wilson*

What Has Me Mashing My Keyboard



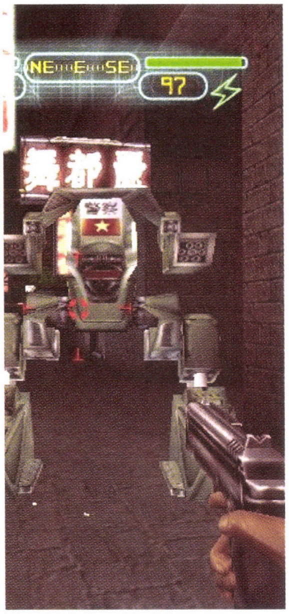
GIRP

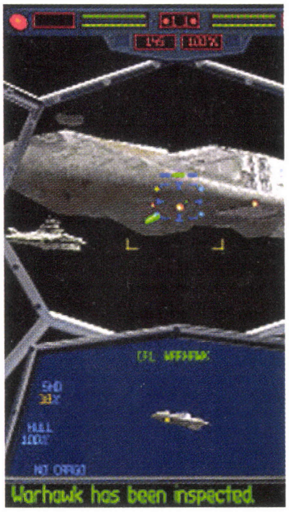
One of the great things about having video games as a hobby is that there's almost always a readily available digital alternative to the many real-life activities that I'm far too lazy to venture out and try my hand at. Offroad racing? Hello, *Dirt*. Skateboarding? Let's trim the fat and boot up *Skate*. But up until recently, I never had a pixelated proxy for one of the outdoors' more treacherous weekend activities: rock climbing. Enter *GIRP*, a browser-based Flash game from the demented mind that brought us *QWOP*, an equally frustrating (and darkly humorous) track racing "sim." It's curse-inducingly difficult, but there's something about *GIRP*'s simplistic presentation and clever use of the QWERTY keyboard that keeps me coming back to it on my lunch breaks.
—*Will Herring*

What We've Gone Back To

Deus Ex

Deus Ex, as a first-person shooter that blends RPG elements and espionage with its gunplay, is still an impressive game today. But after spending some time with *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*, graphically, it's hard to go back. I love the story, despite the occasionally terrible voice acting, and I think it's important to preserve our gaming history by keeping titles like this available. But even a *Half-Life Source*-style makeover wouldn't hurt. Beyond the dated graphics, it's obvious why *Deus Ex* belongs in the pantheon of "best PC games of all time." You don't need to play the original to understand *Human Revolution*—but just to see where several other shooters took inspiration for their own RPG-like mechanics, it's worth another look today.
—*Justin Haywald*





Warhawk has been inspected

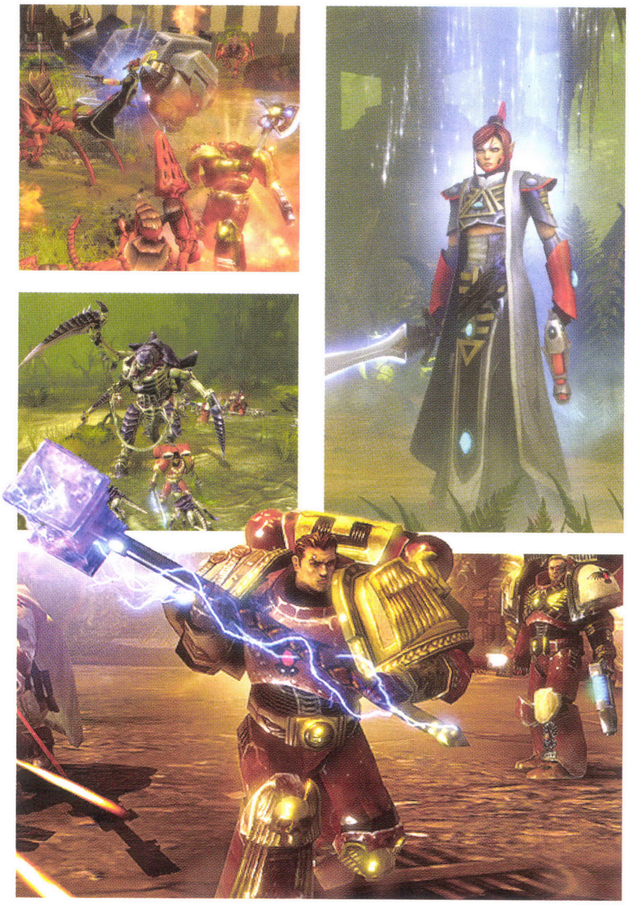
Star Wars: TIE Fighter

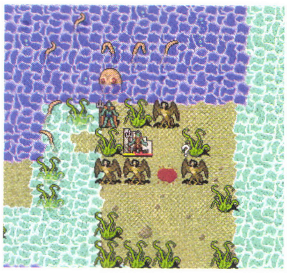
One of the saddest things about the state of PC gaming today is the lack of space sims. This was one of the most popular genres of PC games in the 1990s, but it dried up at the turn of the 21st century. I still love these games, and I decided over one weekend to boot up my collector's CD for *TIE Fighter* (with the expansion packs *Defender of the Empire* and *Enemies of the Empire*). I forgot how hard it could be to take on Rebel Alliance ships in an unshielded TIE—and how much fun it is to use superior tactics to blast X-wings and Y-wings out of space with one. The game's noteworthy for a number of reasons—it's the first video-game appearance of Grand Admiral Thrawn, it gave birth to the TIE Defender starfighter (which is now *Star Wars* canon), and it lets you fly as Darth Vader's copilot. What *Star Wars* fan would turn their nose up at that? —*Jason Wilson*

What We've Gone Back To

Warhammer 40,000 : Dawn of War II

I believe in giving games a second chance. *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War II* didn't click with me the first time I gave it a go in 2008. I'm at a loss to explain why: I'm a RPG and strategy-game nut, so I should love a game that mixes the two, right? And I'm a big fan of *Warhammer 40K* and other Games Workshop properties. So on recent weekend (and from some prodding from Kat), I gave *Dawn of War II* a second try. Surprise! It clicked. Before I knew it, I had blitzed through the first two missions, setting up my Space Marines behind points of cover and turning Orks into green-and-red splats on the ground. The part I'm enjoying the most is its treatment of units—you don't build a base, harvest resources, and grind your forces out; you just get them (or find them or rescue them, depending on the mission). I'm looking forward to further exploration (and annihilation of Orks) with *Dawn of War II*. —*Jason Wilson*



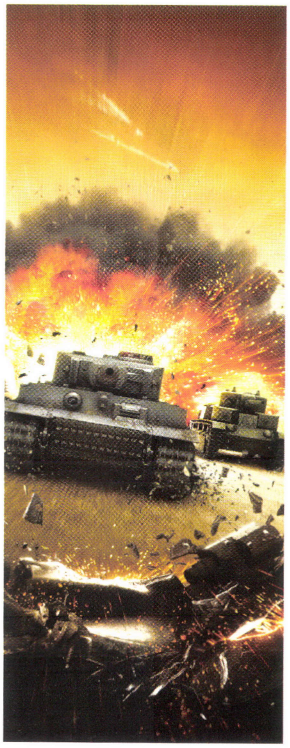


Dungeon Crawl: Stone Soup

Dungeon Crawl is a roguelike from 1995 (these games are turn-based RPGs where for every move you make, the monsters make one of their own. And if you die, death is permanent). *Stone Soup* is an offshoot of that game, kept alive (and for free for PC/Mac/Linux) by a team of dedicated programmers who love the game. *Crawl* isn't for everyone—it's a punishing roguelike, the controls and rules are a bit challenging, and even the more visual tiles version is pretty ugly to look at. But for those you like such games, it's a masterpiece of design. It has a huge number of races and classes to play (including such exotics as ogres, trolls, and draconians!), and since each dungeon is random, it's a new game every time you start out. I sometimes pull out my laptop and dive deep into a dungeon during my commute, and when I'm at home puttering around, I keep it running in a window, making a move or two when I can between washing dishes and changing diapers.
—*Jason Wilson*

World of Tanks

I didn't leave *World of Tanks* because I was dissatisfied with the game. I'm actually enjoying this "free to play" multiplayer tank-battle game quite a bit. But because of review obligations, I had to set aside the game for a few weeks. Now I'm back, and I'm enjoying learning more about the ins-and-outs of this fantastic game. You can't run-and-gun in this one—be sure to use cover effectively; making a straight run at the enemy leaves you open to deadly artillery fire. I'm playing a self-propelled gun (SPG) right now, but I do have an issue with it. When firing, you may use a "over the map" satellite-like view of the battlefield, which really isn't fair. SPGs didn't have the benefit of such battlefields views in World War II, and these make it very easy for the artillery to smash the opposition to bits. I hope developer Wargamming.net considers removing this. Otherwise, I'm having a blast with this game, and I'm eager to see how the recent patch affects gameplay. —*Jason Wilson*



Hardware

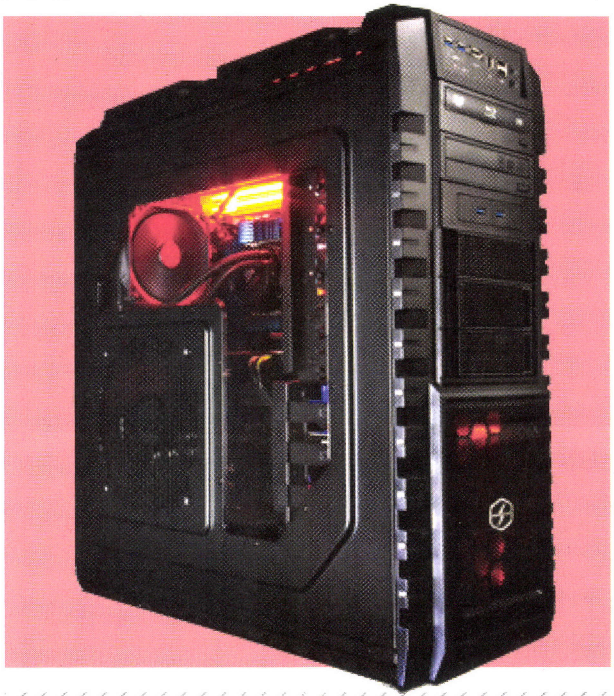
NVIDIA
GEFORCE 3D VISION

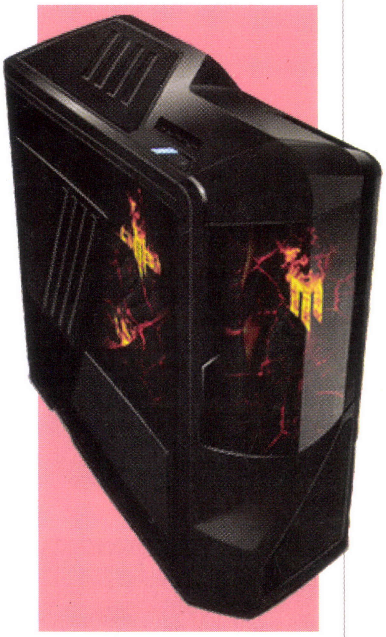
Nvidia's 3D Vision

If you have the opportunity, you owe it to yourself to check out Nvidia's 3D Vision system. While there are only a handful of games that are compatible with 3D vision at this point, and the pricing is prohibitive for many gamers, the visual experience with first-person shooters is something to behold. Whether or not this catches on with the mainstream remains a subject of debate. I could see 3D gaming being a niche market forever or, like with movies, the stampede of 3D titles could be happening at any moment. I've played *Bulletstorm* and *Portal 2* in 3D, and while impressive (especially the former), I can't wait to see epic action titles like *Uncharted 3* or *Arkham City* in 3D. Whatever your opinion on the future of 3D, it'll be interesting to see what games (and genres) thrive with the added dimension.
—*Chris Holt*

Digital Storm's 'Dreadnought'

Digital Storm's "Dreadnought" is one of the meanest-looking PCs I've ever seen. Its angular black chassis is covered in grilles, and the machine glows red on the inside like some bastard child of WOPR (*War Games*) and HAL 9000 (*2001: A Space Odyssey*). And I freakin' love it. At almost 3 feet tall, it's certainly a monster, and the configuration I used (a Level 4: Ultimate that starts at around $1,800) packs a serious punch. Inside it features an Intel Core i7 950 CPU, 6GB 1600MHz RAM, and a Nvidia GTX 580 that handled every PC game I loaded on it with ease—playing *Rift* at top settings at a silky smooth framerate and handling *World of Tanks* so well that I was getting 100-plus fps with all of the settings turned on. Sure, that's not the most cutting-edge game, but it's a game I love playing, and this machine can handle it with aplomb. Where the machine really excels was in my own self-created "ADHD" test—where I'm listening to music, watching videos, and playing games at the same time, tabbing from one thing to another at high speed. It did all this with barely a glitch, which was awesome. While the machine is definitely a little on the pricey side (with the configuration I had), it nevertheless feels like an excellent value for the money for what it packs inside. And if that kind of spec is a little too aggressive for you, the costs can be dialed down to around $1,100 for a machine that will handle most games extremely well. I'm definitely going to be very sad to see my Dreadnought go back to Digital Storm. It's an awesome machine, and if I was in the market for a new premade PC—I'd quite happily buy one with my own money.
—*Jaz Rignall*





The Chimera XLC: The Flames Make It Go Faster

The Chimera XLC doesn't mess around. It sports not one but two of the latest and greatest video cards (the Nvidia GTX 590) and six (yes, six) fans. And just to show that it means business, it sports flames on the chassis. Clearly this is a machine meant for more than crunching spreadsheets.

But being able to run everything under the sun at 60 frames per second doesn't necessarily make it a good value. The price weighs in at a hefty $2,700, which is approximately $2,000 more than you should be spending on any gaming rig. Its main benefit is that it doesn't have to be built from scratch like other PCs, making it perfect for the lazy and the lazy at heart.

So it's not exactly a value proposition, even if it utterly destroys modern PC games. But hey, have you seen those flames?
—*Kat Bailey*

BULLET POINTS

We've boiled down GamePro.com's most notable reviews into tasty bite-sized nuggets of goodness.

The Conduit 2 (Wii)

"High Voltage's shooter sequel isn't a vast improvement over *The Conduit*, but its campy campaign and decent multiplayer is enough to make it worth recommending to fans of the first game."

PROS: Cheesy sci-fi story-line and cheesier dialogue makes campaign worth playing; decent multiplayer; inspired weapon design.
CONS: Visuals are just so-so; controls are terrible with the Wii Remote; story may be too incoherent for some folks.

★★★

Lego Pirates of the Caribbean (PS3/X360/Wii)

"A remarkably flawed game that feels constrained by its source material but also doesn't use it nearly enough."

PROS: Collecting items and secret characters is still entertaining; core gameplay is still fun.
CONS: Many levels feel small and constrained; "dueling" mechanic for unlocking new characters is poorly executed; generic hub world is a major step back from past entries.

★★½

Dream Trigger 3D (3DS)

"The 3DS gets its first twitch-style shoot-'em-up, but *Dream Trigger 3D*'s clever ideas fall short with a lack of visual variety and predictable gameplay."

PROS: One of the kookier 3DS games this early in its life; incredibly deep 3D effect (if your eyes can handle it).
CONS: A bit too much going on at once; one try per stage is more conducive to frustration than practice; not nearly enough visual variety spread out across the 50 stages.

★★½

The Witcher 2: Assassin of Kings (PC)

"Reveling in its difficulty, violence, and mature tale, *The Witcher 2* is one of the top RPGs of this generation and may be the best standalone PC game of 2011."

PROS: Challenging combat that makes you plan out encounters; mature, engrossing story-line; decisions that affect the story; strong character development.
CONS: It may be too difficult for some players; changes in combat may sour some fans of *The Witcher*; no sex cards.

★★★★★

Gatling Gears (XBLA/PSN)

"This fast and frantic twin-stick shooter charms with its impressively detailed environments and frenzied shoot-'em-up gameplay."

PROS: Brilliant pacing; beautifully rendered environments; Survival Mode is a blast.
CONS: Moments of mindless repetitiveness may wear on some gamers.

★★★★½

Darkspore (PC)

"It would've been great if Maxis could have added some variety in the game's missions, but as it stands, *Darkspore* is a fairly redundant game with a slightly interesting character editor."

PROS: Fun, intuitive click-and-slash controls; unique (if underutilized) character customization; great co-op.
CONS: Not enough variety in missions; nonexistent story; no offline play; forgettable characters.

★★★

L.A. Noire (PS3/X360)

"Above all else, *L.A. Noire* is something new, and it's something that I believe this generation sorely needs. And that's just fantastic."

PROS: Spectacularly cinematic MotionScan technology is a game-changer; engaging campaign with a strong story; interrogations and investigations are a blast; 1947 Los Angeles is stunning.
CONS: Some graphical glitches and slowdown; episodic case structure can obscure the overarching narrative; its scripted nature may turn off some gamers.

★★★★★

Nin2-Jump (XBLA)

"For $5, you get a great-looking game as finely tuned as any of Cave's other arcade-style games, making it more than the sum of its parts. Anyone into platforming action should give Nin2-Jump a go."

PROS: Stellar art design and presentation; excellent platforming action.
CONS: Small selection of relatively short stages.

★★★★½

Brink (PS3/X360)

"It's about two or three updates from being one of my favorite shooters of all time, but I'm not reviewing the game I want it to be. I'm reviewing the game that it is, and what it is is something just short of being the awesome experience that I want."

PROS: Awesome character design and visual customization; full of innovative concepts for class-based multiplayer shooters; good variety of maps, challenges, and in-game objectives.
CONS: Doesn't fully execute all of its good ideas; no way to give commands to A.I.-controlled characters; weapons, especially grenades, lack visceral punch

★★★½

Thor: God of Thunder (PS3/X360)

"Lackluster combat, uninspired level design, and an overlong campaign mean that this is one of 2011's more un-Thor-tunate releases."

PROS: Thor's wide range of powers adds some much-needed life to the combat.
CONS: Sluggish controls, poor graphics, inconsistent battle physics, repetitive gameplay, a terrible camera, and bugs all hinder the experience; cheap enemy A.I. and high difficulty; voice acting and cut-scenes are disappointingly uninspired.

★½

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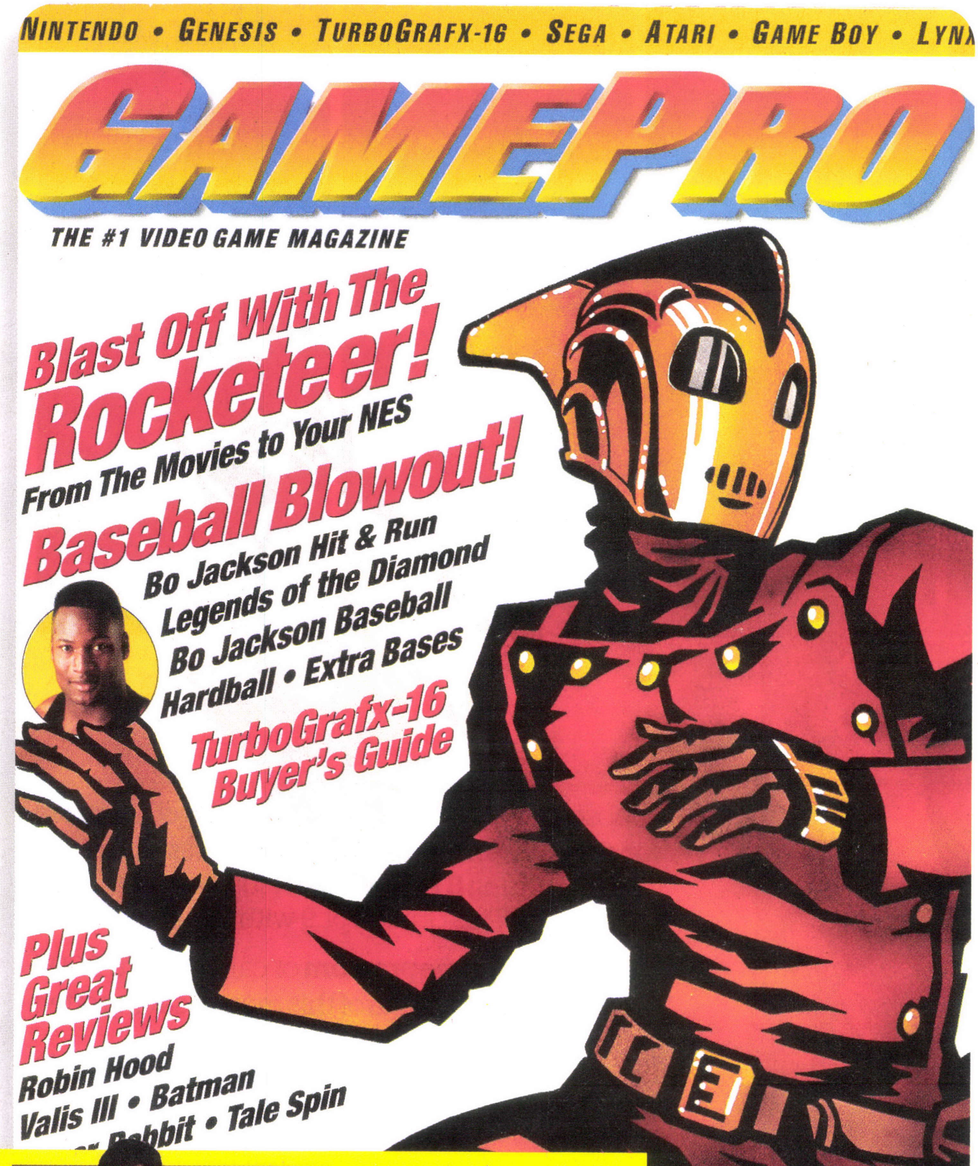

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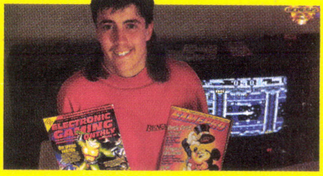

ProTip: Cut the Mullet!

The back of this issue had "pro gamer" Jamie Bunker giving us props with his wicked locks. Hopefully, that rat's nest no longer resides on his head.

Rocket Crash

While the comic book–inspired cover art may be timeless, *The Rocketeer*'s one (and only) video-game experience failed to wow the *GamePros*, earning middling scores in three of five categories.

Bo Knows Excess

With only two baseball titles on the market nowadays, the *15* different hardball games covered in this issue are a bit of sensory overload. While most didn't make it out of the '90s, this issue did feature the first console appearance of EA's long-running baseball franchise, which they later rebranded as *Triple Play* in 1996 and *MVP Baseball* in 2003.

Last Lynx

The 18-page "Atari Adventure" advertorial can be seen as a sendoff for the ill-fated portable. Highlighting the best games out at the time while providing tips on titles like *Splatterhouse* and *MUSHA*, the issue may not have led to more sales of the price-dropped system, but it was a fine obit.

Licenses Ain't Lame

The Rocketeer crashed and burned, but a few other licensed games picked up the slack. While animated adaptations like *Roger Rabbit* and *TaleSpin* performed decently, the NES version of the first *Batman* movie earned almost full scores and still stands among the series' best games today.

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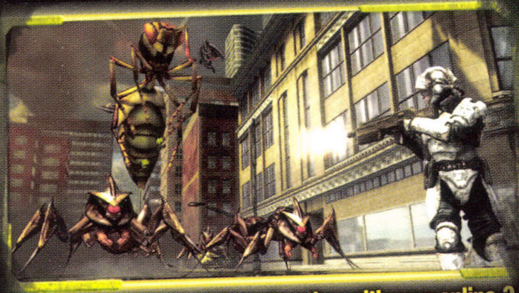

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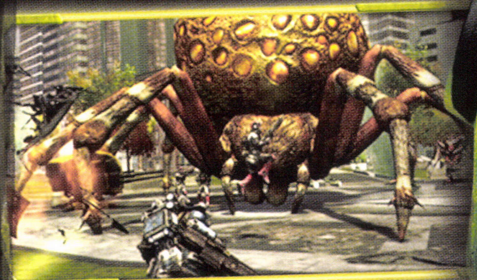

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GREEN LANTERN
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